

‘INVISIBLE TO THE EYE’:  
RHETORICS OF ETHICAL EMOTIONALITY IN  
*MISTER ROGERS’ NEIGHBORHOOD*

by  
Alexandra Castro Klarén

B.A. in History, Sarah Lawrence College, 2002

M.A. in Writing, Johns Hopkins University, 2004

M.A. in Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2009

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Kenneth P. Dietrich Arts & Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh  
2016

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
KENNETH P. DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Alexandra Castro Klarén

It was defended on

April 13, 2016

and approved by

Dr. Tyler Bickford, Assistant Professor, Department of English

Dr. Jane Feuer, Professor, Department of English

Dr. Brenton J. Malin, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Ronald J. Zboray, Professor, Department of Communication

Copyright © by Alexandra Castro Klarén  
2016

‘INVISIBLE TO THE EYE’: RHETORICS OF ETHICAL EMOTIONALITY IN

*MISTER ROGERS’ NEIGHBORHOOD*

Alexandra Castro Klarén, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2016

This dissertation seeks to understand the success, significance, and impact of the children’s television program, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* (1968-2001). It explores the nuanced complexity of Rogers’ thought, the dialogical integration of his various influences, and the intentional ethic of care behind the creation of a program that spoke to the affective, cultural, and educational needs of children (and adults) during a period of cultural and political upheaval in the United States.

Despite the program’s longevity and popularity, it has received only scant attention from humanities scholars. The sole monograph to date interprets the program from a pacifist perspective. My dissertation provides the first full-fledged contextualization of the program, its vision and its enactment, as an innovative intervention into the world of children’s television. Delving into the newly available primary documents at the Fred Rogers Archive, I examined and analyzed speeches, notes, scripts, and letters written by Rogers in order to discover and understand his vision for the *Neighborhood* and his conception of televisual communication. Viewer mail revealed the efficacy and specificity of his heightened parasocial communication techniques and pedagogical objectives. A rhetorical analysis of the program’s first year shows how Rogers interweaves a dialogical ethos with a meticulous study of objects and play to engage young viewers in social-material culture.

Drawing on dialogic theory (M. Bakhtin, P. Friere, R. Arnett, M. Buber), Roger Burggraeve's concept of "ethical emotionality," and D.W. Winnicott's theories of child development, this study shows how Rogers presciently recognized in television the parasocial possibilities for making the critical embodied social-emotional communication connections that humans need to develop and cope in the world. I argue that Rogers deployed the critical orientation of "ethical emotionality" necessary for a "holistic and moral education" (R. Burggraeve). I show how the success of the program revolves around Rogers' establishment of a space of "emotional safety," a pathos recognized by Saint-Exupéry as "invisible to the eye," through rhetorics of care and connection in his televisual encounter. The dissertation's major findings detail how the program's success is largely owed to Rogers' effective deployment of "ethical emotionality," parasociality, and tele-dialogism to reach his viewers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This expansive dissertation project has taken the support of many people. I must first thank my advisor Dr. Ronald J. Zboray for all of his dedicated guidance, mentorship, and direction over the years of my graduate tenure at the University of Pittsburgh. I also want to thank Mary Saracino Zboray for her helpful feedback, comments, and dialoguing about media, culture, and religion. Dr. Brenton J. Malin, my second reader and mentor, deserves my sincere gratitude for his many years of seminar instruction, stimulating conversation, and dedicated support. I also want to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Jane Feuer and Dr. Tyler Bickford, for their insightful contributions to my thinking and for their most helpful feedback on this piece of research.

Second, I owe many thanks to the team at the Fred Rogers Center for welcoming me at the Archives during my visits and for providing a neighborly environment for me to study Rogers' work. I want to especially thank Emily Uhrin, who went above and beyond her archival call of duty to provide me with assistance. Furthermore, she graciously transferred much of her vast knowledge of all things *Mister Rogers* to me in conversation, demonstrating her deep expertise on the program's creator and history. I also thank Rick Fernandes, Executive Director at the Fred Rogers Center for his emphatic support and belief in my work. I am very grateful to Rita Catalano, former Executive Director at the Center, to the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and to the Grable Foundation for the Fred Rogers Memorial Scholarship I was awarded in 2012. This scholarship provided me with the necessary support to carry out this project in the kind of thorough and in-depth fashion it called for. Last, but certainly not least amongst this

special group, I wish to thank Hedda Sharapan and Joanne Rogers for sharing with me their wealth of memories, insights, and knowledge about Fred and *MRN*.

Finally, I thank most profusely, my parents, Peter Klarén and Sara Castro-Klarén for inspiring me throughout my life to think critically about the world, to believe in myself, and to call upon my grandfather, José A. Castro's sense of *mote* when life's challenges present themselves. Thank you for to your unceasing love, strength, care, and support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<a href="#">Introduction.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
Chapter 1:	
<a href="#">Situating Rogers’ Vision: A Socio-Cultural Framing.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Television, Influence, and Interpersonal Connection.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Television—Friend or Foe: Entering the Debates on the New Domestic Machine...39</a>	
<a href="#">Redeploying the Pastoral Ideal.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>
<a href="#">Responding to Exigencies in Postwar America.....</a>	<a href="#">63</a>
<a href="#">Christianity and Mass Entertainment: Tensions and Solutions.....</a>	<a href="#">76</a>
<a href="#">Blurring Boundaries: TV, Pedagogy, Child Development, and the Family.....</a>	<a href="#">91</a>
<a href="#">Conclusion.....</a>	<a href="#">116</a>
Chapter 2:	
<a href="#">Creating the Dialogic: Christianity, Child Development and the Parasocial.....</a>	<a href="#">118</a>
<a href="#">Dialogic Beginnings: Divinity School and the Arsenal Family &amp; Children’s         Center.....</a>	<a href="#">123</a>
<a href="#">The Wounded Healer and the Mutuality of Holy Ground.....</a>	<a href="#">135</a>
<a href="#">Staging Development: Erik Erikson and Fred Rogers.....</a>	<a href="#">148</a>
<a href="#">Creativity and Agape: The Palimpsest of Feeling and Thinking.....</a>	<a href="#">154</a>
<a href="#">Parasocial Interactivity and the Birth of “Mister Rogers”.....</a>	<a href="#">168</a>
<a href="#">Public Pedagogy and the <i>MRN</i> Intervention.....</a>	<a href="#">172</a>
<a href="#">Rogers’ “Philosophy”.....</a>	<a href="#">177</a>



<u>An Anthropocentric Christian-Based Intervention.....</u>	<u>187</u>
<u>Conclusion: A Third Way.....</u>	<u>198</u>
Chapter 3:	
<u>Inside <i>MRN</i>: Objects, Play, and the Cultural Dialectic .....</u>	<u>206</u>
<u>Architecture of the Program.....</u>	<u>214</u>
<u><i>MRN</i>, Object Usage, and the Work of Reality-Making.....</u>	<u>235</u>
<u>Winnicott, Objects, and the Location of Culture.....</u>	<u>244</u>
<u>Origins, History, and Pleasure: <i>MRN</i>'s System of Objects.....</u>	<u>260</u>
<u>Conclusion.....</u>	<u>294</u>
Chapter 4:	
<u>"Won't You Be My Neighbor?": Intergenerational Dialogics in <i>Mister Rogers</i>'</u>	
<u><i>Neighborhood Viewer Mail</i>.....</u>	<u>298</u>
<u>Recognizing, Reuniting, and Reconciling—Dialoging with Young Men.....</u>	<u>309</u>
<u>On Becoming More Human – Dialoguing With a Young Woman.....</u>	<u>325</u>
<u>Sharing Existence – Dialoging with a Grieving Mother.....</u>	<u>337</u>
<u>Critiquing Parents.....</u>	<u>343</u>
<u>Letters from Professionals.....</u>	<u>356</u>
<u>Conclusion: Dialogic Communication Ethics and the Good.....</u>	<u>366</u>
<u>Conclusion.....</u>	<u>373</u>
<u>Bibliography.....</u>	<u>380</u>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figures 1-3. Lance Cardinal's "Mister Rogers' Television House Miniature".....</u>	<u>239-240</u>
<u>Figure 4. Venn Diagram.....</u>	<u>246</u>

## INTRODUCTION

In his 1997 commencement speech to the Memphis Theological Seminary entitled “Invisible Essentials,” Fred Rogers, writing at the age of 69, reflects back on defining moments in his life. He recounts his experience of being bullied when he was an overweight and timid young boy. Afraid to go to school each day, he was, in his own words “a perfect target for ridicule.” One day, after being released from school early, he decided to walk home. Soon after leaving the school grounds, he noticed that he was being followed by a group of boys who quickly gained on him while taunting him verbally. “Freddy, hey fat Freddy,” they shouted, “we’re going to get you, Freddy.” Rogers recalls breaking into a sprint, hoping that he would run fast enough to make it to the house of a widowed neighbor. He remembers praying that she would be home so that he would be taken in and sheltered from the ensuing threat. She was indeed home, and Rogers found “refuge.”<sup>1</sup>

As one might imagine, the painful feelings of shame that resulted from the social abuse and ostracism of bullying affected Rogers’ deeply. He recounted how, when he told the adult caretakers in his life about the bullying, the resounding message he received in response was to “just let on that you don’t care; then nobody will bother you.” But, Rogers recalls, he did care. He resented the treatment and cried to himself whenever he was alone. “I cried through my fingers as I made up songs on the piano.” He sought out stories about people who were “poor in spirit” and derived identification and meaning from those narratives.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fred Rogers, “Invisible Essentials” (speech, Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tennessee, May 10, 1997) in Fred Rogers Archive (hereafter ‘FRA’).

I started to look behind the things that people said and did; and, little by little, concluded that Saint-Exupéry was absolutely right: ‘What is essential is invisible to the eye.’ So after a lot of sadness, I began a lifelong search for what is essential; what it is about my neighbor that doesn’t meet the eye.<sup>2</sup>

Rogers, who transferred to Rollins College from Dartmouth in order to study music composition, planned to become a minister. Such a path certainly made sense considering his defining experiences of bullying and his identification with a God who cares especially for the hurt and downtrodden and who offers healing emotions of love, mercy, and solidarity. But an experience viewing the new technology of television during a break from college triggered his painful childhood experiences and prompted him, he recounts in retrospect, to get involved in the novel mass medium. “I got into television because I saw people throw pies at each other’s faces...And if there’s anything that bothers me, it’s one person demeaning another.”<sup>3</sup>

In this dissertation, I explore Rogers’ search for “the essential,” that which is “invisible to the eye,” through a detailed and dynamic look into his groundbreaking, decades-long-running public television program, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* (hereafter *MRN*) – e.g., his life’s work. Integrating his advanced studies in both child development and Christian theology into the foundational rhetorics of his program, Rogers offered viewers a space of refuge, safety, and affirmation where dialogical connection, learning, and experience could take place at the parasocial level of television. Rogers’ identification of the ways he responded to the hurt of bullying, (1) by finding emotional articulation and release in playing and composing music and (2) by encountering God’s

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers: Spiritual Insights From the World’s Most Beloved Neighbor* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), xxii.

compassionate presence during his own periods of suffering, encapsulates well the overarching directive and ethos of *MRN* and speaks to the ways Rogers conceived of the program as his “television ministry.”

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to examine and analyze the vision, production, and reception of *MRN* from the perspectives of communication, media and culture, rhetoric, and communication ethics. The dissertation covers an arc from imagining the program to implementing it and moves on to an examination on how it was received through an examination of viewer mail from the 1970s and 1980s. I work to answer the following questions: How does Rogers’ conceive of his project? What communication strategies does Rogers employ in *MRN* that set it apart from other children’s programming of the time? Where does *MRN* fit in the socio-cultural milieu of the period? From a rhetorical and aesthetic perspective, what is the program’s socio-historical lineage? From an educational perspective on media and culture, what does *MRN* teach? From a pedagogical perspective, how does Rogers reach viewers and sustain interest for more than thirty years? How was the program received? By analyzing Rogers’ articulations on the program, episodes, scripts, other *MRN* regalia, and viewer mail, this dissertation addresses each of these questions and goes beyond in its findings of the ways Rogers’ conceived and implemented a dialogical rhetorical foundation that masterfully exploits the parasocial elements of the televisual medium.

One cannot gain a thorough understanding of the girth and dynamism of Rogers’ communication project and the cultural phenomenon of *MRN* through a consideration of the program alone; likewise, an inquiry solely into the viewer mail lacks the critical other half of the communication puzzle that prompted such writing – the rhetorical offerings of

the program. For this purpose, the dissertation is organized according to the dynamic stages of dialogical unfolding that Rogers' television creation went through from conception to production, reflection to refinement, and utterance to reception and answerability.

In this regard, I have structured the dissertation in the following sequential and dynamic communication staging: (1) First, I have situated Rogers' project in the socio-cultural milieu of the period, paying special attention to the discourses on television, technology, and culture in order to show the ways Rogers is dialoging with the culture at large; (2) Next, I examine Rogers' articulations on the program, television, education, psychology, theology and culture from various and key moments in the overall lifespan of life-long work on *MRN*; (3) From there I move toward a detailed analysis of the program itself and offer a dynamic reading of the child development theory that guides his rhetorical choices – in particular, his focus on secure attachment and object relations; (4) Finally, I turn toward reception of the program and of Rogers' dialogical communication efforts through an examination and analysis of viewer mail. As this dissertation demonstrates, Rogers' project evolved upon layer upon layer of dialogical practice – creating music to express human emotion, interactive learning with children at the Arsenal Family and Children's Center, using dyadic address throughout *MRN*, constructing and deconstructing everyday objects on *MRN*, and corresponding with viewers via letter writing – and thus follows a structural format of dialectical unfolding.

## Significance of Study

To date, there is only one book length analysis of *MRN* and it focuses almost entirely on making the argument that Rogers' was a pacifist. My study of the *Neighborhood* is groundbreaking in its wide conceptual scope – situating Rogers within the cultural and social milieu of the postwar period, examining and analyzing his initial, developmental, and retrospective thoughts on the program and his values, analyzing and interpreting the seminal first year of the program – its communication culture and ethos, and finally investigating and assaying the reception of the program through an examination of viewer mail. In four unique and interrelated, chapters that develop a sustained analysis of the dialogic and parasocial qualities of the *Neighborhood*, I offer an in-depth, interdisciplinary, and nuanced analytical examination of the ways that Rogers' communication ethos, his understanding of the affective, dialogical realm of personhood, and his insight into the “deeply personal”<sup>4</sup> interactional effects of the television medium were highly innovative, remarkably prescient, and very effective. My dissertation will thus fill a huge gap in television studies, children's media, pedagogy, and communication ethics.

My study is based on original sources that have only recently been made available to the public through the establishment of the Fred Rogers Center and Archive in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. My primary research took place during the academic year of 2012-2013, when I was a Fred Rogers Memorial Scholar. I returned to the Archive intermittently during the years 2014 and 2015 and had electronic access to a plethora of

---

<sup>4</sup> Rogers, interview by Karen Herman, Archive of American Television and Film, 22 July, 1999, <http://emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/fred-rogers>.

Archive holdings as well. I have examined scripts, notes, memos, realia, viewer mail, speeches, and newspaper and magazine clippings that discuss the program and/or Rogers over the course of his many decades on the air.

To date, only a few researchers have attempted to study the viewer mail received by Family Communications, Rogers' media company. Given Rogers' conception of his communication project and the importance of the active response of his viewers, a study of such viewer mail is indispensable to any analysis not only of the show, but of the general cultural environment within which it operated. For example, no analysis has been performed on the thematic responses of the viewers of the *Neighborhood*. With its distinct but closely integrated primary chapters on vision, production, reception—my study contributes to the fields of communication ethics, television studies, media and cultural studies, children's media, and American studies by presenting an inquiry that moves across, with a coherent conceptual framework and method, three distinct aspects of the television event from the perspectives of media and culture, education, and communication ethics.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin writes that "the listener and his response are regularly taken into account when it comes to everyday dialogue and rhetoric," but he also notes that "every other sort of discourse as well is oriented toward an understanding that is 'responsive'—although this orientation is not particularized in an independent act and is not compositionally marked."<sup>5</sup> For Bakhtin, responsive understanding is a "fundamental force" and "one that participates in the formulation of discourse." It involves an "active understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance

---

<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse and the Novel," in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1986), 672.



or support enriching the discourse.”<sup>6</sup> For Bakhtin, a text is a space for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices and modes of discourse, all of which are not just verbal but constitute in fact a socio-historical phenomenon. Thus, the text is always an intertext. It does not express a readymade and immanent autonomous individuality. Instead, the prose-text emerges in the course of the dialogue between different socio-languages and in the relationship between speaker and anticipated audience. Moreover, for Bakhtin, “the word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented to a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction.”

Working off of Bakhtin’s foundational work in conceptualizing the dialogic, Leah Vande Berg extends Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic to the televisual text. She asserts that a text is ambiguous because its meaning relies in large part on who is creating it and constructing the meanings.<sup>7</sup> The people who “read” texts tend to remake and reweave what they have “read” in terms of their own personal experiences and perceptions.<sup>8</sup> In turn, John Fiske argues that “texts are the sites of conflict” between their sources of production and modes of reception.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, the intentions of a television producers and viewers perceptions can significantly diverge or can achieve high degrees of convergence as in the case, as we will see, of *MRN*. Further, different viewers may “see” remarkably different shows.<sup>10</sup>

My dissertation focuses on vision, production, and reception for this reason. It is important to underscore the fact that a dialogic approach that necessarily includes

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Leah R. Vande Berg et al., eds, “Semiotic/Structural Criticism,” in *Critical Approaches to Television*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 69.

<sup>8</sup> Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6.2 (1989): 103-122.

<sup>9</sup> Vande Berg et al., “Semiotic/Structural Criticism,” 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

reception keeps us from falling into the trap of looking at the film text alone, which would be like listening to the sound of one hand clapping. These three aspects of investigation have never been studied in their inherent and essential dynamic play of interaction on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

By engaging in a critical dialogic reading of Rogers' envisioning texts, episodes of the first year of the *Neighborhood*, and viewer mail, my findings make a significant and dynamic contribution to communication studies, cultural studies in general, American popular culture, and, of course, to media and television studies. I show the existence of the permeating power of the dialogic on *MRN* and illustrate the ways that Rogers was able to create a heightened parasocial dynamic between him and his viewer as a result of his keen understanding of embodied communication (e.g., speech tone, sustained eye contact, and relaxed but controlled body movement) of which television uniquely affords. I detail the ways that Rogers deploys the findings of Donald Woods Winnicott through a highly ritualized and redundant anthropological study of objects and homo-faber. In the future, I plan to expand my analysis of the program by examining the dramatic life of these objects of study as they pass through Rogers "television house" and into the fantasy play world of the 'Neighborhood of Make Believe.'

According to Vande Berg, textual studies, semiotic studies and rhetorical studies, and reception studies comprise the core of critical approaches to television today. My study makes a refreshing contribution to rhetorical studies with special regard to questions of communication ethics, persuasion and the challenge of multi-culturalism in the fabric of an assumed, but perhaps not fully justified, American *sensus communis* of the time. Clearly, I bring a critical perspective informed by the scholarship of the last

thirty years on American culture to my analysis of the program. My dissertation establishes *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as a media and cultural event of indispensable importance in regards to the creation of a specific social and emotional sensibility that millions of Americans identified with and embraced as their own.

The following four chapters constitute the first study of the program from the interdisciplinary perspective of communication studies. In view of the fact that the official biography of Fred Rogers is currently in the works and expected out in 2017,<sup>11</sup> my study will provide the public with a critical historical and rhetorical analysis of the program that will resonate with the biography and fill an important gap in television studies, children's television, communication ethics, and cultural studies.

### **Theoretical Literature**

My discussion of Rogers' pedagogical communication project is grounded in several compatible interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives on communication ethics and pedagogy that speak to the fundamental rhetorical frameworks of the program as designed by Rogers and his primary consultant, University of Pittsburgh professor of child development and Arsenal Family and Children's Center co-founder Dr. Margaret McFarland. At the core of Rogers' approach, I argue, is a highly developed empathic, invitational, and dialogic ethos that creates a heightened parasocial dynamic between him and his viewer. By beginning each "television visit" with an ethical orientation that seeks to establish an 'I-Thou'<sup>12</sup> relationship of trust and care, Rogers, over the course of thirty

---

<sup>11</sup> Maxwell King, former executive director of the Fred Rogers' Center and current CEO of the Pittsburgh Foundation, is writing the first-ever full biography of Fred Rogers.

<sup>12</sup> See Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), 11.

minutes each weekday, creates the conditions for a dialogue in which participants explore possibilities and questions within the social dynamic of friendship and the larger imaginary socius of a neighborhood.

I deploy ethicist, philosopher, and theologian Roger Burggraeve's concept of "ethical emotionality" as an illuminating theoretical matrix for examining and analyzing Rogers' various points of departure in creating and recreating the social and moral world of the *Neighborhood*. Burggraeve reflects on the dynamic between education and values that he argues account for the construction of a holistic and moral religious education. Burggraeve establishes as first principle for the project of such an education the orientation and practice of an 'ethical emotionality' that gives way to an "experience of belongingness in security and participation whereby both the confrontation with what is 'reasonable' and ethically responsible as well as the integration in a sustaining perspective of meaning is embedded and made possible."<sup>13</sup> Burggraeve's emphasis on the body in regards to the conveyance of such 'ethical emotionality' is keenly important to Rogers' communication project as television's secondary orality<sup>14</sup> nature affords, through its embodied execution, location in the intimate space of the domestic, and episodic nature, a penetrating parasocial interactional sensory dynamic. His discussion of a relational and emotionally involved God places both emotionality and dyadic relationship at both the start and the center of the educational process and in this regard helps to clarify and better understand Rogers' ritual practice of relational affirmation throughout the enactment of *MRN*.

---

<sup>13</sup> Roger Burggraeve, "A Holistic Values Education: Emotionality, Rationality and Meaning," EFTRE European Conference, Järvenpää 2004, 1.

<sup>14</sup> See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1983).

Burggraeve draws from child development theorist, Winnicott's insights into the ways "emotional embedment" creates the necessary 'potential space' for education to further elaborate the importance of 'ethical emotionality' as first principle in education. I also deploy Winnicottian psychological understandings of the emotional life of the child as a way of viewing Rogers' constitutive rhetorical frameworks and discursive thematics. In the third chapter, I focus on Rogers' consistent movement from dialogical engagement and the embodied creation of an 'invitational' ethos and atmosphere to the investigation and manipulation of an object. Such movement speaks to the Winnicottian understanding of the necessary acts for the development of healthy personhood, which begins with the process of forming a secure attachment to mother and continues towards the growth of a more independent self who is able to detach from mother and engage in culture (i.e., the constructive engagement with the wider material and social world).

Rogers has stated that he sees the production of his children's television show as a space infused by the Holy Spirit in which he, as a servant of God, strives to minister to the *deepest* and most *essential* needs of children—to be loved and accepted just as they are.<sup>15</sup> I describe, explain and analyze Rogers' thinking regarding his television production as ministry primarily in the first two chapters. Rogers appears to understand the relationship between God and human beings, and the relationship between Martin Buber's "I and Thou"<sup>16</sup> as a dialogical process of communication<sup>17</sup> in which both sender

---

<sup>15</sup> Hollingsworth, *Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*, 34-35.

<sup>16</sup> In *I and Thou* (1958), Martin Buber posits a primary relationships (I-Thou) that is "characterized by openness, reciprocity, and a deep sense of personal involvement" (Kenneth Seekin, "Martin Buber," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 104.

<sup>17</sup> In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin posits that "all rhetorical forms, monologic in their compositional structure, are oriented toward the listener and his answer. This orientation toward the listener is usually considered the basic constitutive feature of all rhetorical discourse" (672). In my dissertation, I will be working with Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical constitution of authors, texts, programs, and audiences. In this regard, it is important to note that Pertti Alasuutari, in his essay on the third (newest) generation of

and receiver are engaged in a mutual dynamic of discovery. In Buber's 'I-Thou' framework, which I deploy in my analysis of *MRN*, "all real living is meeting" and "no system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Rogers is keenly interested in this meeting and posits it as primary for his "television visit." "I'm not that interested in 'mass communications,'" Rogers wrote, "I am much more interested in what happens between this person and the one watching. The space between the television set and that person who's watching is very holy ground."<sup>19</sup> In such a dynamic, God is neither dictator nor judge.<sup>20</sup> Rogers thus envisioned his program as a possible space for giving birth to what he calls "a holy ground of communication"—that space between any two people in which each is accepted "exactly as you are."<sup>21</sup> This is the space that is essential, Rogers asserts quoting Saint-Exupéry, and yet "invisible to the eye."<sup>22</sup>

The invocation of such a potentially dialogical space between the television persona and the viewer suggests a lengthy consideration of communication ethics from the perspective of dialogue. In my analysis and discussion of Rogers' dialogical approach, I further draw upon key concepts in communication ethics articulated by

---

audience studies, states that scholars need to "bear in mind that audience is, most of all, a discursive construct produced by a particular analytic gaze" (Pertti Alasuutari, introduction to *Rethinking The Media Audience: The New Agenda*, ed. Alasuutari [London: Sage, 1999, 6]). John Tulloch, in his "The Implied Audience in Soap Opera Production: Everyday Rhetorical Strategies Amongst Television Professionals" attempts to give shape to the kind of audience study that Alasuutari calls for (see Tulloch, "The Implied Audience," in Alasuutari, *Rethinking the Media Audience*. In it, he redeploys Bakhtin's dialogic theory of the constitution of messages as well as Bakhtin's theory of rhetoric in order to establish the groundwork for a study of audiences that avoids the monologic pitfalls of the ethnographic, second wave of audience studies. I will offer a more detailed discussion of Bakhtin's dialogic theory of communication in the literature review.

<sup>18</sup> Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Fred Rogers Company Website, "About Us," accessed 1 July, 2013, <http://www.fredrogers.org/about/>.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers' theology emphasizes the message of Christ, the reformer, who brings forth a God that cares for his creation and is accessible and in touch with mankind.

<sup>21</sup> Hollingsworth, *Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Robert C. Arnett, a leading scholar in the subfield. In his work, *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference*, Arnett et al. posit that in the increasingly fragmented society of postmodern America, the application of various goods is “negotiated and enacted through discourse.”<sup>23</sup> Considering Rogers’ practice of ministering through narrative and dialogue, Arnett’s understanding of narrative and dialogic communication ethics proves helpful in analyzing and interpreting Rogers’ approach.

Rogers’ dialogic understanding of television is clarified when he later asserts that contrary to those who believe that television presupposes a passive audience and has little influence on people, the medium is in fact quite powerful not only because it can persuade, but because of its invitation to response. “Why would advertisers pay so much money to put their messages on a medium that doesn’t affect us all that much?” he asks. “I do feel that what we see and hear on the screen is a part of who we become.”<sup>24</sup> It would seem here that Rogers’ vision entails an understanding of the viewer as an active participant in what television critics of the time<sup>25</sup> had characterized as a monologic communication process. Moreover, his understanding of television’s communication process points to an even deeper layer of consciousness that is constitutive of who we are—his statement, “I do feel that what we see and hear on the screen is a part of who we become,” borders on an ontological claim.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ronald C. Arnett et al., *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 4.

<sup>24</sup> See Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1957).

<sup>25</sup> One of the earliest (1930s) media theories that sought to understand the effects film and television had on the population was called the “hypodermic-needle model” (or “magic bullet theory”). It suggested that the media “shoot” their messages directly into passive viewers. By the 1950s, television criticism “constructed the audiences as persons of little cultivation or motivation, passively consuming whatever TV presented, and depicted the industry as crass commercializers” (Richard Butsch, *The Citizen Audience: Crowds, Publics, and Individuals* [New York: Routledge: 2008], 104-5).

*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was created for broadcasting on the National Education Television network, which later was renamed the Public Broadcasting Service, which we know today. As such, it was designed to provide educational programming to very young children and their families. Identifying early on that because of its physical location within the family domain, television discourses would likely become part of the family communication culture, he eventually named his production company Family Communion. I deploy the prominent work of Lynn Spigel to discuss the ways that television was perceived as a “window to the world” during its beginning stages and to further outline the dual tensions and excitement that arose as a result of its introduction into the home space. Further exploring the educational elements of *MRN* and the ways Rogers exploited its unique parasocial nature, I draw critical connections between the dialogic educational theory of Paulo Freire, Walter Ong’s understanding of secondary orality and the ways embodied communication functions at primal biological levels, and Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl’s conceptualization of parasocial interaction that relates the critical episodic and domestic nature of television.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, in my chapter on Rogers’ ritual enactment of object usage and relations, I draw upon Jean Baudrillard’s writings on moderns and postmoderns’ quest for *authenticity*. Rogers, who I argue incorporates values of the agrarian village, the Protestant ethos (e.g., thrift, simplicity), and the pastoral ideal, privileges unadorned, handmade, and other non-commodified objects in his quest to help foster an appreciation of work, craftsmanship, discipline, and creativity through visual enactments of the homo-

---

<sup>26</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1983); Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19.3 (1956): 215-29.



faber concept. Baudrillard discusses the fascination of handicraft, which, he writes, “derives from an object having passed through the hands of someone the marks of whose labour are still inscribed thereupon.”<sup>27</sup> According to Baudrillard, as modern capitalist subjects we are particularly “fascinated by what has been *created*, and is therefore unique, because the *moment* of creation cannot be reproduced.”<sup>28</sup> Rogers, who never once allowed a puppet or other fixture from his program to be industrially reproduced and sold at stores, seems very interested in creating a culture of authenticity on *MRN* in which the social relations in art and human production are complimentary. His efforts in both dialogical engagement and object relations point toward a longing for an integrated, holistic culture and socius during an age of increased alienation, pluralisation, and mass society.

### Preview of Chapters

In Chapter 1, “Situating Rogers’ Vision: A Socio-Cultural Framing,” I place Rogers vision and understanding of his *MRN* project within the socio-cultural milieu of the period. Here, I situate his understandings relative to the historical moment and to the dominant, residual, and emergent cultures of the American postwar era.<sup>29</sup> I argue that Rogers, who was highly critical of the vaudevillian and slapstick performances dominant in early television, set out to employ television to restore the anthropocentric and community values of a residual, yet once dominant, mainline Protestant ethos through the integration of romantic agrarianism, an arts and crafts aesthetic, a Gospel-inspired

---

<sup>27</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (New York: Verso, 1996), 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond Williams, “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent,” in his *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-27.

perspective on personhood and pastoral care, and the new and groundbreaking findings of the changing and increasingly influential field of child development. Here, I further situate Rogers' prescient articulations on television, its communicative power, and its parasocial possibilities within broader historical discussions of communication technologies and their cultural implications. More broadly, I argue that Rogers set out to employ television to communicate through dialogical pedagogy a set of anthropocentric behavioral, ethical, and cultural values that he hoped would contribute to the formation of postwar subjectivities in a rapidly changing and culturally-contested period. In this way, I show how he performs a pedagogical intervention into the public sphere by privileging a televisual interpersonal communication ethic, with an emphasis on mutuality, the management of feelings, and the maintenance of ethical social relationships, in order to counter the increasing privileging of commercial, slapstick forms

In Chapter 2, "Creating the Dialogic: Christianity, Child Development, and the Parasocial," I analyze the ways Rogers incorporated psychological and ethical insights derived from his experience working with children as a student of child development at Pittsburgh's Arsenal Family and Children's Center and as an M.Div student of Pastoral Care at the Presbyterian Seminary. I argue that he developed a dialogical, 'I-Thou,' communication ethic and practice centered on social emotional learning and the creation of meaning, which he honed and developed for the television medium. I further show how University of Pittsburgh Professor Margaret McFarland, co-founder of the Arsenal and expert in child development, who consulted with Rogers on every script that he wrote, profoundly influenced and assisted Rogers' understanding of how children might read each rhetorical choice. Finally, I examine Rogers' theological formulations and the

debates ensuing at the Pittsburgh Presbyterian Seminar during the period when he was a student to show how he incorporated this critical element of understanding into his communication project. Thus, in this chapter I illustrate how the project ensued in layer upon layer of dialogical practice.

In chapter 3, “Inside *MRN*: Objects, Play, and the Cultural Dialectic,” a detailed look at each program that ran during the first year reveals that a consistent and ritualized emphasis on investigating the uses of everyday material objects, their social meanings, and their creative potentiality is central to the show’s construction. The object thus becomes the starting point for the creative, enacted and embodied unfolding of a culture and a people who constitute and occupy a small, manageable world called *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. Here, I show that the program constitutes the representation of a culture’s materiality that is organized by social principles that promote values of discovery, transformation, and growth at the levels of the material world, the social world that gives meaning to the material world, and the emotional and moral world of the *Neighborhood*.

In the fourth and final chapter, “Intergenerational Dialogics in *MRN* Viewer Mail,” I examine correspondence between viewers and Rogers. This study further reveals the success of Rogers’ dialogic ethos in prompting discursive responses among viewers. Viewer letters affirm Rogers’ sense of dialoging with his audience as he responded to each one. That he retained all the correspondence over thirty-three years testifies to the unusual importance it holds for his communication project. As in previous chapters, I draw on Belgian philosopher Rogers Burrgraeve’s conceptualization of “ethical emotionality,” which he defines as “passion through and for the other” or “heteronomous affection” for the vulnerable face of the other as a useful theoretical framework for

analyzing the letters. These letters reveal a remarkable consistency in their collective thematic quality and constitute a field of study about the dialogical relationship between “Mister Rogers,” the historical Fred Rogers, and the *Neighborhood*’s audience. Most viewers write to express an emotional and affective identification with Rogers, illustrating well the success of his dialogical ethos, the social-emotional developmental emphasis of the program, and Rogers’ ability to create emotional safety that breaks through the parasocial dimension and into the realm of individual communication exchange.

When I embarked on this project, I did not expect that the questions I asked would be answered with such overwhelmingly complex, dialogical interplay between the fields of developmental psychology, communication ethics, television studies, and American and religious studies. While I knew that what many people see as a dull, slow, and simple children’s program was likely to be revealed as more complex and dynamic if one probed underneath the surface, I did not expect to find such complexity of thought, integration of knowledge, practical engagement, and contemplative idea creation displayed both behind the scenes and in front of the *MRN* camera. My dissertation reveals the hardworking dedication, intellectual and emotional struggles, and intensive consideration of a television artist striving to create a dialogical production that placed valued ideas and practices from a residual American culture (i.e., an Agrarian and mainline Protestant ethos) in conversation with an emergent and influential discipline of study (i.e., postwar child development psychology) to create a cultural product that spoke to the perceived needs of transitional subjectivities searching for new meanings and ways of coping and being in a new mass-mediated age.

Rogers liked to quote from Saint-Exupéry: “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.” In the following chapters, I will reveal the various ways that his mass communication project was constituted by dialogical communication acts of seeing and being seen. For Fred Rogers (and Antoine Saint-Exupéry), one can only truly see through the heart – the symbol of the socio-emotional psyche. In Mister Rogers’ neighborhood, the heart is the organ of vision and the dialogic is the place where we begin.

## CHAPTER 1:

### Situating Rogers' Vision: A Socio-Cultural Framing

In the October 1969 volume of the *Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association Publication*, Fred Rogers co-authored a piece with Linda J. Philbrick, former head teacher of Oakland Nursery School, entitled “Television and the Viewing Child.” In it, Rogers and Philbrick describe the reaction of a young girl named Nancy to an episode of *The Three Stooges* television program in which the Stooges are shown harming a dog. “I want to go into the television and help it [the dog],” Nancy says as she burrows her face in her mother’s lap, “but I’m afraid that they will hurt me too.”<sup>1</sup> Rogers and Philbrick use this anecdote to lead into a larger discussion about young children’s perceptions of the actors and scenarios they view on the television screen. They note Nancy’s “deep emotional involvement”<sup>2</sup> with the encounter on the screen and how her mother was taken aback by her daughter’s reaction. “The young child’s limited experience and immature perceptual system,” they write, “makes it difficult for him to separate fantasy from reality.”<sup>3</sup> They continue:

The vivid images presented by the television camera make it even more difficult for him when these images are violent and frightening, the child faces an additional dilemma. Since television is a piece of furniture, placed in the home by parents, it is endowed with an air of parental sanction. Children witness their parents firmly terminating a sibling battle, but sitting and staring in apparent unconcern while a bloody slaughter takes place on television. This presents deep confusion for the child who perceives one incident to be as real as the other. Much public concern has been expressed over the effect that the content of violent television programs have on children. We also need to be concerned about how these

---

<sup>1</sup> Rogers and Linda Philbrick, “Television and the Viewing Child,” *Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association Publication* 4 (October 1969): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

programs affect the child's relationship with the people who present them.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Indeed, concern regarding the media as creating and inciting children's fears and emotional disturbances has been present in American media discourses since the arrival of film in the early twentieth century. The most famous, in regards to the history of the mass media, are the Payne Fund Studies of 1928-33. The primary researchers involved in this study, members of the University of Chicago's sociology department, sought to answer the question, "how were movies affecting the youth of America?" During the 1920s, the presiding sociology professors at Chicago, Albion Small, a Baptist minister, Robert H. Park, and Ernest W. Burgess had focused much of the department's research on social phenomena relating to the city—its underside, its ethnic and class diversity, and its changing nature. Films and their mass viewing venues originated in cities, e.g., the Nickelodeon, and researchers like those in the Sociology department at Chicago viewed its possible social influence, like other questionable phenomena tied to urban life, as possibly linked to pathological social behaviors that seemed to emerge from this environment in greater numbers as compared to the country's rural sites of settlement. As Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarve, and Kathryn H. Fuller write, these scholars "saw conditions in the cities as possible harbingers of what was to be visited on their country cousins" (*Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 3). Articles and press releases from the fall of 1932 touted the Studies' findings that purportedly discovered "deleterious effects of the movies on children (95)." More recent research (e.g., Singer, Slovak, Frierson, York) has documented correlatives between heavy television viewing, regardless of program selection, and negative emotional consequences for children. For example, a 1998 study by Mark I. Singer et al. of third-eighth grade Ohio public school children revealed that as television viewing increases in daily quantity, so too does the pervasiveness of symptoms of psychological trauma such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. See Singer, Karen Slovak, Tracey Frierson, and Peter York, "Viewing Preferences, Symptoms of Psychological Trauma, and Violent Behaviors Among Children Who Watch Television," *Journal of the American Academy of Children and Adolescent Psychiatry* 37 (1998): 1041-48. In the realm of interpretive hermeneutics methodology, Joseph Jay Tobin discovered in 2000, that like adults, children engage in polysemous readings of television programming and are therefore capable of producing nuanced and resistant interpretations of the media they watch (see his *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats: Children's Talk About the Media* [New York: Teachers College Press, 2000]). Still, the documentation of the "fright-producing" effects of media on children has been most studied in terms of immediate emotional impact and response, which began during the 1920s and 30s. In 1933, Herbert Blumer, author of *Movies and Conduct*, noted that 93% of children he spoke with reported being frightened or horrified by a film. Similarly, in a recent study, around 75% of children in two separate samples said that they had been scared by something they had seen in a movie or on television (see B. J. Wilson, et al., "Children's Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Techniques to Reduce Fear from Mass Media," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 8 [1987], 32-52). During the same time that the Payne Fund Studies published their findings, broadcasting became the subject of public survey and debate as a result of the outcries of a group of Scarsdale, New York mothers who voiced their concerns regarding radio programming that perceived as potentially harmful to their children. Their protestations were publicized by a number of special interest magazines such as *The Christian Century* (a mainline Protestant magazine focused on "religious news," especially issues related to theology, morality, and culture), *Commonweal* (a Catholic newsweekly focused on politics, religion, and the common good), the *New Republic*, and *Saturday Review* (a secular weekly, formerly *The Saturday Review of Literature*). This kind of public criticism and critique of media and its potentially harmful effects on children was echoed with similar arguments with the arrival of television in the 1940s and 50s (See Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992], 36-72). As documented by a number of media historians, alarmist and concerned discourses regarding the potential nefarious social effects of mass media content on children have ebbed and flowed within the American public sphere since Anthony Comstock's move to regulate dime novels in the late nineteenth century. Mark I. West, "The Role of Sexual Repression in Anthony Comstock's Campaign to Censor Children's Dime Novels," *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 45-49.

In this rich and revealing paragraph, Rogers and Philbrick communicate insightful observations, analysis, and concern for the complexities involved in the then-novel process of children's televisual reception and communication. Clearly, Rogers and Philbrick are onto a new understanding of the deep emotional involvement of the television-viewing child. In their analysis, they make an original link between the lived emotion felt by the child and her ethical sense of this emotion as it calls for action to resolve the conflict. Nancy cannot stop the beating of the helpless dog, of course, because she cannot enter the contiguous and yet impossibly distant space depicted on the screen. Revealingly, Rogers and Philbrick speak of the child's dilemma, which, in and of itself, addresses the "ethical emotionality"<sup>5</sup> that underscores the creative fabric of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Adding to the dilemma of the child's original response to the ethical imperative is the fact that the parent, by not intervening, seems to the child to be paradoxically condoning the unethical events that have now entered into their family dynamic. "As adults," they write, "we may feel that we 'permit' the happenings on the television screen because we clearly recognize them as unreal."<sup>6</sup> Rogers and Philbrick

---

<sup>5</sup> "Ethical emotionality" is a term created by Belgian ethicist, philosopher, and theologian Roger Burggraeve in his paper, "A Holistic Values Education: Emotionality, Rationality and Meaning," EFTRE European Conference, Järvenpää 2004. In it, Burggraeve lays out three fundamental conditions for a "holistic moral and religious education according to a 'triptych of emotionality, rationality, and meaning'" (Burggraeve, 1). In this triptych, "emotionality" is posed as the "primary foundation for holistic education" due to its experiential nature, constituted by a sense of belongingness in security and participation, "whereby both the confrontation with what is 'reasonable' and ethically responsible, as well as the integration in a sustaining perspective of meaning is embedded and made possible" (Burggraeve, 1). Burggraeve's theorizing on the essentiality of "ethical emotionality" in education is rooted in a Christian theological framework that posits a "relational and emotionally involved God" who "comes near" and "binds himself" with his human children in a forgiving, reconciliatory, and loving way (Burggraeve, 17). It is for this reason that I will use Burggraeve's concept of "ethical emotionality" as a framework for understanding Rogers's communication ethos and affect. As we will learn, Rogers's religious foundation in the Protestant tradition of Presbyterianism and his advanced theological studies contributed most notably to his ways of thinking about and understanding the world, human relationships and activity, and the art of learning and being. Indeed, Rogers considered his program, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, his "television ministry" and spent years studying for his Masters degree in Divinity at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary during his lunch hours at WQED.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



are, of course, speaking of the adults' learned ability to compartmentalize so that while they intervene in conflict within the family system, they allow for representations of conflict on television to go on unmitigated. To the child, this compartmentalization represents an emotionally distressing and puzzling behavior for the "ethical emotionality" attendant to the experience of viewing the beating of a dog goes unaddressed. It is this understanding of the "ethical emotionality" embedded in television programming, further compounded by the reality that this medium operates within the home space of the family that serves as the key point of inflection in Rogers' television creation.

This stress on the ways in which the television interacts and interferes with the actual human relationships of those in the family culture/environment of the home is one of the most unique and innovative aspects of Rogers' philosophy and approach to his own television program. In almost every document he produced that develops the main ideas and framework for the program, Rogers emphasizes the significant location and proxemics of the television set as existing within the domestic space of the family home and thus embedded in the family communication culture. At the same time, Rogers' analysis of television is deeply grounded within and influenced by a troubled popular discourse on television and children rooted in concern over the new media's effects on emotional development, social life, morality and human behavior.

In this chapter, I situate Rogers within the socio-cultural milieu that frames his understanding of *MRN* and its relation to his historical moment. Rogers, who entered the new industry of television as an NBC production assistant during its initial exploratory and experimental phase, eventually made the decision to create his own programming when he grew frustrated watching and assisting with the production of content that, from

his perspective, showcased churlish and surly behaviors. “I got into television because I saw people throwing pies at each other’s faces,” Rogers told author and Christian Broadcasting Network journalist Amy Hollingsworth, “and if there’s anything that bothers me, it’s one person demeaning another.”<sup>7</sup> Trained as a musician and composer with former Presbyterian ministerial ambitions, Rogers moved quickly from critic to producer, asserting that the new medium could be used to display and promote more elevating, ethical, and nurturing ways of being and behaving.

I argue that Rogers, in identifying the vast communication opportunities that the new television technologies created in regards to reaching a wide net of Americans in their familial environment, and in trying to counter what he perceived as representations of callous and debased behavior displayed on the new medium, set out to employ television to communicate through dialogical and theatrical pedagogy a set of anthropocentric<sup>8</sup> behavioral, ethical, and cultural values that he hoped would contribute to the stabilization and formation of postwar subjectivities in a rapidly changing and culturally-contested period. In this regard, he aimed to perform a pedagogical intervention into the public sphere by privileging a televisual interpersonal communication ethic, with an emphasis on mutuality, the management of feelings, and the maintenance of ethical social relationships, in order to counter the industry’s increasing privileging of commercial, vaudevillian and slapstick entertainment forms. In this chapter, I examine and analyze key oral and written statements by Rogers and his primary child development consultant, Dr. Margaret McFarland, in order to begin to

---

<sup>7</sup> Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> I will use this term in the same sense that Rogers ascribes to it in his 1984 notes, which I discuss fully at the end of Chapter 2. Rogers understands the term, *anthropocentric*, as an ethical thrust that places the healing of human wounds as central.

construct Rogers' vision and conception of his television program and situate it in the cultural debates of the period. Rogers' collaboration with McFarland is notable in regards to my interest in understanding his project from a broader socio-cultural historical perspective in which his efforts can be positioned within the dynamic and multi-faceted lineage of the Pastoral ideal, the rhetoric of the "technological sublime," American Progressivism, and mainline Protestant interventions into mass media.<sup>9</sup>

### **Television, Influence, and Interpersonal Connection**

In her 1992 book, *Make Room for Television*, historian Lynn Spigel asserts that television, which was initially designed *within* a piece of furniture<sup>10</sup> in order to blend with other objects in the "living" (familial social) space of the home, transformed the previous intimacy of the home as it provided an opening for "strangers" to occupy a space previously restricted to only those of kinship.<sup>11</sup> Television scholar Grant Noble

---

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, I am providing here a working definition of the term "progressivism" that is drawn from historians George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi. The Progressive movement arose in the late nineteenth century, in response to the vast changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization. It was varied and comprehensive and thus almost defies definition. In general, the Progressives goals were greater democracy, ethical and efficient government, regulation of big business and moneyed interests, and social justice for working people. As a movement, it is better characterized as representing the animating spirit of the age rather than a monolithic, organized group or party. According to Tindall and Shi, "what reformers shared was a common assumption that the complex social ills and tensions generated by the urban-industrial revolution required expanding the scope of local, state, and federal government authority so as to elevate the public interest over private greed" (Tindal and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 8th ed. [New York: W. W. Norton, 2012], 675). Many Progressives were motivated by Christian precepts, which led them to concentrate on ethical and moral reforms, e.g. Prohibition. For more on the Progressive political struggle, see Michael McGerr's *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> In 1927, the American architect and futurist R. Buckminster Fuller displayed his "Dymaxion House," a glass octagonal construction with a steel frame, intended to include a television set, at Marshall Fields department store in Chicago. He billed the structure, "the house of tomorrow" (Spigel, *Make Room for Television*, 1).

<sup>11</sup> For sure, radio was a precursor to television in regards to the emergence of mass media products that brought embodied (oral) communication messages from the public into the private space of the family. Yet the origins of the radio lay with independent "ham" operators, who later collaborated with the first radio stations started at a handful of Universities. As one might expect, these University radio stations, such as

distinguishes key characteristics that highlight the important differences between television and “cinema films.” For one, film is viewed in the darkness, in a public space with unfamiliar surroundings. The screen is large; its size and that of the images depicted on it can overwhelm the viewer. The characters in a film rarely appear in more than one film. In contrast, television is viewed in the familiar space of the home, usually with the lights on, and in the presence of family members. The screen is small, indeed smaller than a child or adult person. And finally, the same characters appear week after week in series programming. Newscasters appear daily. “Children,” Noble notes, “report that they answer the talking head when it simulates face to face interaction.” These characteristics are of critical importance for understanding how television functions on an interpersonal, and familiar social level.

In a speech he delivered at a Yale symposium on young children and television in 1972, Rogers says that “Television, whether by intent or accident, is now an essential aspect of practically every home. Even families without telephones have television sets – consequently, the attitudes expressed by us or anyone else on television become involved

---

KOAC at the University of Iowa, envisioned their primary mission to deliver educational programming to those in broadcasting reach. Such programming efforts also followed quite naturally the “extension education” efforts of these land-grant institutions in the ways that they sought to extend their knowledge to the community-at-large in service of the greater public good. This concept of utilizing radio for the greater good of the American public and democratic practice was an ideal held by most Americans in the early 1920s. It was not until those interested in disseminating advertising on the airwaves got involved in broadcasting that the American people grew skeptical of messages from the outside entering the privacy of the home. Indeed, advertising “was regarded [by the public] with great skepticism” and the public responded with outrage at the notion that advertisements should be allowed to enter the radio broadcasting space (Robert McChesney, “Conflict, Not Consensus,” in *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, ed. William Samuel Solomon and McChesney [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], 225). See also McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, and Hugh Richard Slotten, *Radio’s Hidden Voice: The Origins of Public Broadcasting in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

in family communications.”<sup>12</sup> Here, Rogers emphasizes the interpersonal aura and function of the television, a consistent theme in his writings. It is from this critical observation of television’s interpersonal *modus operandi* that Rogers builds his program’s approach to educating both young children and their parents. As we will see, his program is, at its core, an interpersonal, dialogical, and familial endeavor, in which Rogers, the host, ritually establishes and reestablishes an intimate, parasocial relationship<sup>13</sup> with his intergenerational viewers in order to reassure them about their worth, the stability of the world around them, and the importance of creating and maintaining a life-giving ethos with both themselves and others.<sup>14</sup>

Rogers’ launching off point in the Yale speech asserts that any person delivering messages on a consistent basis through the television medium will almost “organically” become incorporated into the communication culture and interpretive meaning-making processes of the family unit. Although his analytical assessment of television reiterates

---

<sup>12</sup> Fred Rogers, “Yale,” Television Professionals Look At Children’s Programs, New Haven, CT, 16 Oct. 1972, BOX #EU3, Fred Rogers Archive, Latrobe PA (hereafter ‘FRA’). See also “Simpler Shows For Television Urged by ‘Mr. Rogers’ at Yale,” *Bridgeport Telegram*, 17 Oct., 1972, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Horton and Richard Wohl coined the term “para-social relationship” in “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19.3 (1956): 215-29. The “para-social relationship” describes the intimate, “face-to-face relationship” that they argue comes to exist between the mass media spectator and performer(s). This perception is, however, illusory and solely takes place within the mind of the viewer, who feels as if he/she is involved in real interaction with the performer.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers was certainly not the only television “star” to establish a parasocial relationship with his viewers, as Horton and Wohl write about this phenomena in relation to their observations of viewers, and radio listeners of all sorts of programming. In fact, Rogers stumbled upon the technique of addressing just one child viewer when, while working as a production assistant for NBC, he asked the host of western *The Gaby Hayes Show*, Gaby Hayes, how he overcame his stage fright. Hayes responded, “Freddie, I just pretend I’m looking at one little buckaroo out there.” Rogers, who was trepidacious about stepping out from his usual behind-the-scenes position as a puppeteer on *The Children’s Corner* (1954), employed Hayes’ technique when developing *Misterogers* for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a program that was well received by child television viewers and critics alike. In his development of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, he continued this dialogical style of address, most likely noting its efficacy in reaching viewers and also in regards to the ways it aligns with his child development-minded approach to children’s programming which holds the relationship of trust between “Mister Rogers” and the child viewer in the most precious regard.

the prominent cultural understanding of television's unique position within the realm of the family institution,<sup>15</sup> Rogers' articulation of the penetrating significance of this positionality in regards to the ways that televisual communication functions *within* the family communication culture<sup>16</sup> itself offers a nuanced perspective on the phenomena in its implied personification aspects of television technology.

In 1985, communication scholar Joshua Meyrowitz noted that "much more than in print, electronic media tend to unite sender and receiver in an intimate web of personal experience and feeling" due to the embodied, oral nature of human representation on the screen.<sup>17</sup> He sets up a contrast between the discursive nature of print communication, in which messages are communicated through the use of language or language-like symbols, and the "presentational" nature of electronic media, in which embodied human

---

<sup>15</sup> See Spigel, *Make Room for Television*, 36-72.

<sup>16</sup> Note that my approach is cultural and not behavioral, like that of the following scholars. Family communication scholars "focus the messages and discourses by which members define, develop, and enact families and on the specific communication processes by which family is performed across different family types and contexts." Of critical importance to scholars of family communication is the "recognition that families are discourse dependent." In other words, families negotiate expectations and familial identities through interaction with others." Central to the field of inquiry is the aim to examine and shed light upon the discourses, practices, and processes by which "families talk themselves into being, that is how families are maintained, changed, and challenged through interaction" (Dawn O. Braithwaite, et al., "Family Communication," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Communication*, last modified 27 February 2013, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0104.xml?rskey=NwypB4&result=41>). This last point is most notable in regards to the ways that Fred Rogers envisioned the communication he was doing with families. He saw himself inserting ideas and prompting discussion about a variety of phenomena within the family sphere of communication and social interaction. As we will see in chapter 3, viewers wrote letters to Mister Rogers, responding to his invitations to dialogue. In these letters, many noted discussing the questions he posed on the television screen for days afterwards with their respective family members. Rogers, a student of child development, who named his production company "Family Communications, was especially interested in having conversations with viewers about the nature of the family, family dynamics, family conflicts, parenting, and other everyday concerns related to the family. Although he show was designed for reception by the child viewer and focused on the education for children, he, like many child development experts, saw the family as the most important and critical educational and social institution in the child's life. For more on family communication and television, see entry on "Family Communication" in *Oxford Bibliographies in Communication*. For more on family communication and television from a behavioral perspective, see: James Lull, "Family Communication Patterns and the Social Uses of Television," *Communication Research* 7.3 (1980): 319-33.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96.

expressions dominate. Written language ‘communicates,’ Meyrowitz writes, while electronic media is characterized by ‘expressions.’ Expressions are personal and idiosyncratic; in contrast, communication can be about anything. Meyrowitz then relates these two contrasting styles—communication and expression—to Erving Goffman’s back and front regions. Print media, Goffman posited, have a ‘front region bias,’ meaning that the brain processes this information within the context of a conception of public life. In contrast, electronic media, characterized by ‘expressive,’ embodied communication practice, have a ‘back region bias.’ That is to say, this form speaks to the part of the brain that connects with the personal or the familial. “Discursive and presentational forms are so distinct that they are apparently produced and perceived primarily by different hemispheres of our brains.”<sup>18</sup> It is due to the embodied nature of electronic communication—its orality, physicality, and expressive quality—that a more personal, elementary kind of response occurs within listeners and viewers. Thus, if this form of media is brought into the home, it makes sense that those communicating on the device could become integrated into the family communication culture, which is constituted by an embodied togetherness in the home space in which communication is primarily oral.<sup>19</sup>

As Brent Malin writes in his 2013 book on emotion and media technology, *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology*, discussions concerning media and embodiment have been present in Western Civilization since Plato and Socrates. “The sense of eerie disembodiment with which Socrates experienced a written speech was replicated by many early twentieth-century thinkers, who listened to disembodied voices

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>19</sup> For more discussion of television and family culture/communication, especially as it relates to the communication device’s emotional, cognitive, and spatial importance in postmodern everyday life, see Roger Silverstone’s *Television and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

emerging from their record players or ‘floating through the ether’ as a radio broadcast,” Malin writes.<sup>20</sup> And yet, television, like film, is revolutionary in its ability to capture and represent of human communication in its primary, embodied, oral form.<sup>21</sup>

It is this connection between the new televisual communication process, which allows the primary oral human communication practice to be both audibly and visually represented, and its location within the home space of the family unit that leads Rogers, in his 1972 Yale speech, to his next observation on television’s effects on human development.

Have you ever observed a baby at her mother’s breast? Did you notice how carefully the baby watched its mother’s face as it sucked and drank her milk? Do you ever notice a similar site with people watching television? Older children eating popcorn and cokes, younger ones sucking on their fingers. If this association is by any means a valid one, then television viewing must be considered as having its roots at the very core of human development.

Rogers follows this analytical analogy noting that the difference between looking at most mothers and looking at television sets is that “a human mother can help the baby develop active modes with dealing with what he or she is feeling, while the television set invariably presents some kind of stimulation and lets the viewers drink it in as they will.” He thus concludes that the effects of television viewing should be considered with specific regard for the possibility that children viewers “are exposed to experiences which may be far beyond what their egos can deal with effectively” as in the case of young Nancy and her frustration with watching the dog being abused. Here, Rogers reveals the grounding philosophical and psychological positions from which his socio-pedagogical

---

<sup>20</sup> Brenton J. Malin, *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology and Emotion in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>21</sup> See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1983), for a discussion on orality as the primary and fundamental human communication posture and practice.



project departs. In this statement, he is not only questioning the content of television programs but the damaging neglect on the part of those who create and produce television for children. He calls on such producers to assume their responsibility of addressing the subjectivity of the child as different from the subjectivity of the adult. “Those of us who produce television must assume the responsibility for providing images of trustworthy available adults who will modulate these experiences and attempt to keep them within manageable limits,” he asserts. Rogers’ visionary directive here illustrates his focus on providing a sense of security, responsibility, reassurance, and “appropriate” content to children via television.

Both the Yale speech and the narrative he authored with Philbrick for the Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association Publication are illustrative of Rogers’ keen analysis and insights into the visceral communicative power of televisual representation. They are also effused with Rogers’ deep sense of care for the child’s emotional and developmental wellbeing and thus inscribed with an overarching ethical imperative for adults (and parents especially) to understand their role in mediating the child’s viewing experience. As such, they are demonstrative of the primary social-emotional concerns that drive Rogers’ efforts in television production, his prescient understanding of the interpersonal connections made between screen players, events, and viewers, and his understanding of his project as a kind of family intervention. In later chapters I will show how, indeed quite remarkably, *MRN* captures and enacts in televisual form Rogers’ initial understanding of and vision for his project as an intervention in childhood culture and pedagogy.

In this chapter I first open a window into national discussions of the period regarding television and its categorical connection to the placement of machines into domestic spaces. In the first section, “Television—Friend or Foe: Entering into Debates on the New Domestic Machine,” I discuss the expressions of anxieties surrounding the potential threats of the new television device as well as the ways that domestic machines were resemanticized with anthropomorphic qualities—qualities that ascribed to television an aura of familial membership.

Next, in “Redeploying the Pastoral Ideal,” I delve into the rhetoric of the technological sublime in an effort to place Rogers within a pastoral ideal concerned with the machine’s challenges to a once dominant agrarian culture in which values of community, creative work, and social-emotional bonds were of primary importance for human health and survival. In this section, I analogize the *Neighborhood* with Leo Marx’s conceptualization of the “middle landscape,” a place of cultivated nature where serenity is achieved and where the two polarities of men as inscribed in the Western tradition – the rational and the emotional – can be reconciled. The *Neighborhood* as middle landscape embodies the artificiality of the city and cultivates the naturalness of the pastoral such that threats of the wilderness are safely avoided. In this regard, one could argue that the middle landscape, discussed interchangeably with the Arcadian village, offers an ideal stage for the project of raising (“taming”) the young – a project that Rogers had made his life’s work.

In the third section, “Responding to Exigencies in Postwar America,” I detail how I see the middle landscape/Arcadian village of *MRN* and its emphasis on the “invisible essentials” characteristic of its way of life, e.g. community building, creative work, and

the development of social-emotional bonds, as a response to the frustrations and anxieties at work during the postwar period of the 1950s and 60s. Here I provide an overview of some of the key, bestselling works of cultural criticism that raise concerns about the perceived increasing alienation, destruction of community bonds, rampant narcissism, unbridled consumption, and flattening of the individual taking place at the time. *MRN* offers a quiet, calm, interpersonal, and inventive environment in response to these alienating forces in an attempt to restore an affective sense of self-worth, human connection, and creative work in the mind of the viewer.

In the fourth section, “Christianity and Mass Entertainment: Tensions and Solutions,” I discuss a lineage of American Christian concern with theatrical content and efforts to address such concern that ranged from censorship to proactive intervention. Here I point to the broader struggle of a Protestant establishment fighting to maintain its cultural dominance within a rapidly changing early-mid twentieth century environment characterized by urbanization, industrialization, increasing mobility, immigration and pluralism. I identify and analyze the ways that Rogers fits into this lineage as a television artist and Presbyterian minister beginning in the 1960s. Rogers’ project is most interesting in this regard as he works within the secular realm of public television, straddling the line of public life and acceptable religious expression during a time period that many scholars might label as the beginning of the post-Christian era in the West.

In the fifth and final section, “Blurring Boundaries: TV, Pedagogy, Child Development and the Family,” I return to the problematics of television as a device that further, and dramatically, blurs the boundaries between public and private life. I do this by focusing on the ways that Rogers and his lead consultant, Dr. Margaret McFarland,

understand their project as a pedagogical family intervention and note its place within a Progressive approach to achieving educational equality at the national level (PBS). Here I make telling connections between McFarland's identification of the remarkable interpersonal nature of Rogers' relationship with his young viewers and new child development theories about the importance of affective bonding between adults and children, of which McFarland had become an expert. I contextualize McFarland and Rogers' approach to child development within a critical shift in child development theory during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s that established as critical the social-emotional needs of the child. Furthermore, I discuss the parasocial elements of televisual communication in the context of McFarland's identification of its transcendent abilities to, if used "properly" (like Rogers uses it), model best practices for adults to engage with children and foster "healthy" child development.

Rogers' solution to the problem of exposing children to representations of images and human behavior that they are not emotionally or cognitively equipped to process reveals his insightful and critical perspective on the medium's reception. For one, he asks producers to become more aware and self-critical of the programming destined to the child viewer whose cognitive and emotional abilities are significantly distinct from the adult viewer. Second, he posits that in watching such disturbing content on the television with the child, the adult is essentially condoning the behavior depicted on the screen. Starting in the early nineteenth century onward, a system of adult chaperoning, and

mediation was established middle-class practice in the U.S. in order to protect the young from early exposure to the conflicts and dramas of life.<sup>22</sup>

In a document that I discuss later in the chapter entitled, “Children’s TV: What the Church Can Do About It” Rogers decries the ways that television programming, and its anti-educational, debased content, is quickly becoming a dominant cultural force in children’s lives. If television is added to the existing pedagogical sites such as the church, the family, and the school, then, Rogers seems to posit, its children’s programming should be subject to a standard regime of carefully prescribed emotional and ethical staging. From the Victorian period on, adults were in charge of exposing the young to various forms of socio-ethical knowledge and assisting them in intellectually and emotionally grasping concepts and phenomena. In his assessment, Rogers appears to be alerting his audience to the fact that television transmits content to whomever is watching, without any local sort of adult system of censorship or chaperoning.<sup>23</sup> Further, viewers watching perceive the human activity on the screen in ways similar to that of real life and the process of watching at home arguably creates a more intimate and personal

---

<sup>22</sup> See Richard Sennett, *Families Against the City: Middle Class Homes of Industrial Chicago 1872-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), and Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Historically, the invention of modern childhood emerged simultaneously with the invention of the modern family. As noted by Phillipe Ariès, the “event” that created the modern family was the invention and gradual extension of formal schooling (*Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick [New York: Vintage, 1962], 412). Publishing *The Disappearance of Childhood* in 1982, prolific sociology and communication scholar Neil Postman also ties the invention of the modern family with the emergence of writing and print culture, and more specifically with democratized access to education. He writes that “[t]he social requirement that children be formally educated for long periods led to a reorientation of parents’ relationships to their children” as “expectations and responsibilities became more serious and enriched as parents evolved into guardians, custodians, protectors, nurturers, punishers, arbiters of taste and rectitude” (*The Disappearance of Childhood* [New York: Vintage, 1984], 44). This development is key to understanding Rogers’ concerns about television in regards to its placement in the domestic place of the family system and especially in relation to the child’s development. It is important to note, however, that Ariès’ invention theory has been challenged, most significantly by Linda A. Pollack, *Parent-Child Relations From 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and by Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1992).

relationship with screen characters who appear every day or every week in their homes.<sup>24</sup>

It is thus irresponsible, Rogers argues, for adults charged with instructing and caring for the younger generation to allow children unbridled and unaccompanied viewing of representations they have not yet reviewed and deemed worthy of consumption.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to his perspective on the radical changes television brings to the lives of children in regards to content exposure and adult supervision, Rogers details the ways that television's representation of human life appears to affect individuals in an interpersonal, almost familial way by likening images of people watching television to that of a baby nursing at the breast of her mother. Rogers' analogy configures an understanding of the dynamic between the screen and the viewer that can be understood in relation to Horton and Wohl's concept of the parasocial relationship. In this relationship, they write, characters portrayed in audio-visual media like television "come

---

<sup>24</sup> See Horton and Wohl's discussion of para-social interaction and the ways that images presented on the television screen, especially, "make available nuances of appearance and gesture to which ordinary social perception is attentive and to which interaction is cued" (215). "Sometimes the 'actor' – whether he is playing himself or performing in a fictional role – is seen engaged with others; but often he faces the spectator, uses the mode of direct address, talks as if he were conversing personally and privately. The audience, for its part, responds with something more than mere running observation; it is, as it were, subtly insinuated into the program's action and internal social relationships and, by dint of this kind of staging, is ambiguously transformed into a group which observes and participates in the show by turns" (Horton and Wohl, 215). Further, as discussed by Grant Noble who addresses child television viewing from the developmental psychology perspective of Jean Piaget, young children up until the age of seven, who are prone to think in a binary way, consider television as reality because their brains are not yet capable of understanding that people can act dramatic roles (See "Child Development and Televiewing," in *Children in Front of the Small Screen* [London: Constable, 1975], 83).

<sup>25</sup> Writing in 2002, some forty-five years after *MRN* debuted on public television, child advocate James Steyer described television as "the other parent" (*The Other Parent: The Inside Story of Media's Effect on Our Children* [New York: Atria Books, 2002], 5). He notes how children spend 40 percent less time with their parents than they did in the 1960s. Taking the place of parental supervision in an overwhelming way, he asserts, is television programming. Children spend more than forty hours per week in front of the television set at the turn of the twenty-first century. "Think about it, if another adult spent five or six hours a day with your kids, regularly exposing them to sex, violence, and rampantly commercial values, you would probably forbid that person to have further contact with them," he writes. "Yet most of us passively allow the media to expose our kids routinely to these same behaviors—sometimes worse—and do virtually nothing about it" (Steyer, *The Other Parent*, 5).

to life....in an especially vivid and arresting way.”<sup>26</sup> The parasocial experience entails the erasure of the line that separates reality from fiction such that the viewer becomes mesmerized by events that transpire in the televisual space and therefore develop a kind of “real” relationship with the characters. This interpersonal way of connecting and relating, brought about by the power of orality that television revives, bears relating to Walter Ong’s observations of orality and the sacral power of the spoken word that binds individuals into communities.

Because in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word precedes from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups. The interiorizing force of the oral relates in a special way to the sacral, to the ultimate concerns of existence.<sup>27</sup>

When Rogers notes that those watching television behave similar to babies who are sucking from their mother’s breast, he alludes to the essential, organic and material process of bonding and interpersonal formation that is the very essence of human social life. It is the formation of these close-knit bonds that constitute what Emile Durkheim identified as the sacramental bonds of community, which he posited emerge from religion and the concept of the sacred.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Ong points out that in most religions, “the spoken word functions integrally in ceremonial and devotional life” because the voice emerges from the materiality of the human body.<sup>29</sup> In this way, Rogers appears to identify in television the very fundamental communication pathways that allow for the development

---

<sup>26</sup> I will address Rogers’ assessment in relation to Horton and Wohl’s article, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” later in this chapter.

<sup>27</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74.

of significant human bonding and community formation in which he will make an intervention.

As I will also show later on in the chapter, Rogers' perspective on the family's critical position as educator of the young, as constituted by the deep and essential bond created by constant contact and communication, is informed by his advanced academic studies with child development psychologist and University of Pittsburgh professor, Dr. Margaret McFarland. McFarland asserted that all education in our society is founded upon in the interactions of infants and young children and their parents. As such, the family, she wrote, "is the primary educational institution."<sup>30</sup> McFarland then goes on to criticize the development of a primary educational system that avoids the family altogether as an educational unit. As I will show, McFarland and Rogers saw an opportunity with television, to make a cultural and pedagogical intervention into the American family unit, especially in regards to its educational role in child development and upbringing. Television, like radio before it,<sup>31</sup> thus posed opportunities to transcend the former institutionalized educational system hindered by its non-familial organizational model, class-structured economic inequalities, and curriculum differences.

McFarland's assertion that the family is the primary and most effective educational institution questioned the limitations of standardized Progressive practices of

---

<sup>30</sup> Margaret McFarland, "To Whom It May Concern," Box # EU68, Fred Rogers Archives, Latrobe, PA. Note that McFarland's assertion here is not a novel contention. See Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). See also the scholarship of Lawrence A. Cremin, the Seventh President of Columbia University's Teacher's College.

<sup>31</sup> In *Radio's Hidden Voice: The Origins of Public Broadcasting in the United States*, Sloten discusses how early University radio stations employed the technology for public service programming including dissemination of new agricultural methods and programs for rural schools that included music lessons and calisthenics programming. University radio stations were "especially distinctive in helping to establish public-service ideals that would provide a robust alternative to commercial practices" and were central to "establishing the idea of broadcasting as a noncommercial public service" (41-42).



the time, in which a model of institutionalized early education had become compulsory for American youth. Such practices were developed as part of a larger, national mission by Progressives to reduce inequality in the U.S. by providing better educational opportunities to low-income people and communities through government-funded institutions like public schools. Postwar liberals, Anna McCarthy contends, aligned themselves not with working-class politics of solidarity, but rather with classical liberal philosophy. As such, they “diagnosed the potential contradictions emerging from the postwar economy’s emphasis on mass consumption in terms of inadequate moral education of the populace.”<sup>32</sup> McFarland wrote that “there is much to be said for preschool education when the teachers are well-qualified and basically concerned for the development of the children but such groups are a family supplement and not a family substitute.”<sup>33</sup> Now, with the new television technology, traditional educators and “cultural elites” like McFarland and Rogers could administer a finely tuned cultural and educational program that taught the insights of child development psychology “inside” the most important pedagogical system of the family.

### **Television—Friend or Foe:**

#### **Entering the Debates On The New Domestic Machine**

At the turn of the twentieth century, Progressives grew increasingly concerned about the “dehumanizing effects of machines.” Tasks previously employed by individual

---

<sup>32</sup> Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: Free Press, 2013), 18. For an interpretation that offers a counter-argument on the postwar connections between liberalism and mass consumption, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> McFarland, “To Whom It May Concern.”

labor and the physical work of human hands were transferred to new technologies, resulting in the mechanization of human work.<sup>34</sup> The idea of having machines regulate relations in the family domestic setting was met by ambivalent response in many American homes as long-held agrarian ideals festered in the collective imagination and challenged the emerging mechanized world.<sup>35</sup>

The new invasion of household machines contributed to what Spigel calls a redefinition of the concept of family leisure from the Victorian understanding of spiritual development that prepared members for daily duties to a modern and more secular one designed to “liberate” subjects from the toils of work life. In this new industrialized domestic setting, everyday domestic duties such as the washing of clothes, as well as traditional leisurely pursuits such as playing the piano or reading stories aloud, were reassigned to the work of these household machines (e.g., electronic washing machines, radio).<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, although household machines were promoted as devices that would reduce the laborious manual work of women in the home, “they reorganized the work processes of housework in ways that did not save the labor of the average housewife.”<sup>37</sup> As such, a tension ensued in the culture between a celebration of new pleasures and an anxiety about the reorganization of time and relationships being spelled out by the machines.<sup>38</sup> Suffice it to say that there were notable variations across different areas and regions of the country in these overall patterns.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Spigel, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Ruth Susan Cowan, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1983).

<sup>37</sup> Cowan, *More Work For Mother*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Cowan notes that “those who lived in urban areas probably had shifted from the production to the consumption of most goods earlier than those who lived in rural districts, and those who were economically comfortable before those who were economically deprived” (78).

As the economy shifted from production to consumption during the early part of the twentieth-century<sup>40</sup> and mass production in particular removed productive work from the private sphere, persuasion agents of the new consumer economy set out to ease anxiety over the vast social and economic changes that the new household technologies brought about. For example, in the 1920s and 30s, “child experts” writing for *Parents’ Magazine*, encouraged parents to provide allowances for their children in a move to counter the old ethos of thrift education preached in the schools. This reassessment most likely involved such “knowledge workers” doing the bidding of the magazine’s advertisers.<sup>41</sup> In this new environment emerged the new subjectivity of the consumer, who, “courted by new kinds of advertising, purchased new kinds of goods at new kinds of stores,” culminating in the “wholesale transformation of most Americans’ daily life from near-subsistence farming to mass participation in the money economy both as workers and consumers.”<sup>42</sup> Because of their reimagined role as keeper of a household in which using and overseeing the work of machines was key, women were targeted by advertisers as a primary audience for the marketing of such devices.<sup>43</sup>

By the 1950s, similar efforts were made by industry agents to refamiliarize the population with the new machine of television. Many popular magazines described the television device as a “newborn baby,” a “family friend,” a nurse,” a “teacher,” and a “family pet.”<sup>44</sup> Here, the tension has given way to a resemantization of the domestic machine, which has moved from the position of a stranger, intruding upon the family

---

<sup>40</sup> See Cowan, 71-78.

<sup>41</sup> See Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 81.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Henry Holt, 1982), 242-243.

<sup>43</sup> See *ibid*, 243. Also notable in regards to the various pedagogies of the new economy are the phenomenon of home economists, who schooled women in shopping planning and techniques.

<sup>44</sup> Spiegel, *Make Room for Television*, 50.

space, into a constitutive and subordinate “member” of the family. While citizen groups and others interested in the public good (e.g. journalists and activists) remained suspicious of the presence of this machine in the home life, advertisers, for whom the television was poised to become indispensable, sought to neutralize its negative image by incorporating a rhetoric of the technological sublime in its messaging. For example, a 1951 newspaper advertisement by the Admiral Corporation, a maker of televisions, features an image of a seductive, ethnically ambiguous, exotic, and glamorous woman with long eyelashes and dressed in a strapless top looking off into the distance as she rests her chin on her gloved hand. Her grand presence is set just behind a smaller television device that features an image of a white man and woman, most conventional in appearance, singing. The visual rhetoric lends a sense of conventional, Americana familiarity within the frame of the television “box,” while at the same time emphasizing the abilities of television to transport its owner to larger-than-life exotic and seductive places and peoples. In a mix of script and print, the ad headline reads, “Built for the Future, Admiral 20ii tv.” Just below the set in smaller letters it states, “WORLD’S MOST POWERFUL TV: READY FOR UHF STATIONS.”<sup>45</sup> Such ads focused on the device’s ability to broadcast both the glamour culture of Hollywood and the more conventional Americana musical entertainment shows into the home space.

On the other hand, Spigel notes how advertisers, perhaps attuned to discourse that anthropomorphized the device, often conjured the relational image of master-servant to assure potential consumers that the device would operate as other machinery in the house did and with the primary purpose of serving family, household needs. A 1952 newspaper

---

<sup>45</sup> “Built for the Future. Admiral 20ii TV. World’s Most Powerful TV. Ready for UHF Stations,” Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections, [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_TV0010/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_TV0010/).

advertisement for Magnavox television sets featured a photograph of a young boy standing next to a large television set and manipulating the channel changing knob. He smiles while exerting his control over the depiction on the screen—a clown in full makeup and red nose who appears as if he is staring right back at the boy. Notably, the boy looks down at the clown, whose head is tilted upward to see him. The image displays a high power-low power dynamic in which the boy holds the former status position.<sup>46</sup>

Still, efforts to anthropomorphize the device did not succeed with everyone and the media cultural critics continued to express doubts.”<sup>47</sup> Within a discourse of threat and warning, popular magazine writers posited the idea of a “technology out of control” that had the potential to wreak havoc on family life.<sup>48</sup> In 1956, prominent critic Jack Gould of the *New York Times* noted that while television broadcasters should not be expected to “solve life’s problems....they can be expected to display adult leadership and responsibility in areas where they do have some significant influence.”<sup>49</sup> Gould went on to decry the promotion of performer Elvis Presley, who Gould described as partaking in “strip-tease behavior,” to a teenage television audience. Gould places the phenomenon of television with a host of other early to mid-century developments that were uprooting young adults from the traditional dwelling places of home and school.

With even 16-year-olds capable of commanding \$20 or \$30 a week in their spare time, with access to automobiles at an early age, with communications media of all kinds exposing them to new thoughts very early in life, theirs indeed is a high degree of independence. Inevitably it

---

<sup>46</sup> “Greatest Television Achievement in Years. New Form Factor in Magnavox Design gives you 27-inch screen in compact cabinet scaled to grace the average sized room,” Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections, [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_TV0018/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_TV0018/).

<sup>47</sup> Spigel, *Make Room For Television*, 50.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>49</sup> Jack Gould, “Elvis Presley: Lack of Responsibility Is Shown by TV in Exploiting Teenagers,” September 16, 1956,” in *Watching Television Come of Age: The New York Times Reviews by Jack Gould*, ed. Lewis L. Gould (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 131-32.

has been accompanied by a lessening of parental control.<sup>50</sup>

Gould prefaces this concern over the lessening of restrictions for young adults by noting that “family counselors” have “wisely noted” that the culture is in a period of “frantic” and “tense” transition.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the threat of the television machine dominating and destroying an idealized harmonious family life, there was concern about its “encouragement of passive and addictive behavior.”<sup>52</sup> In his 1968 social-scientific research tome commissioned by the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, *“The People Look at Television: A Study of Audience Attitudes*, Gary A. Steiner lists “passivity and distraction” as one of the most salient concerns of parents whom he and his research team interviewed about television and the family. For example, one responder said the following:

I think the main disadvantage of television for children is not so much what it inspires them to do, but what they miss by sitting down and watching television. It takes time away from reading and outdoor activities, which is why we limit it. It is a form of entertainment in which they do not participate.<sup>53</sup>

Steiner notes that many mothers note the device’s interference with time normally allotted for school assignments.

Further illustrating this concern with passivity and distraction from the perspective of the mass media, is a page from a 1950 issue of *Ladies Home Journal* on the “Telebugeye.” The copy presents a profile drawing of a small child

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for Television*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Gary A. Steiner, *The People Look At Television: A Study of Audiences and Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 94.

slumped on a stool watching the television set. Her eye is attentive, large, and fixated on the screen; her hair is scraggly, and she does not wear shoes. The copy below the drawing reads:

This pale, weak, stupid-looking creature is a Telebug eye and, as you can see, it grew bugeyed by looking at television too long. Telebugeyes just sit and sit watching, watching. This one doesn't wear shoes because it never goes out in the fresh air any more and it's skinny because it doesn't get any exercise. The hair on this Telebugeye is straggly and long because it won't get a haircut for fear of missing a program. What idiots Telebugeyes are.

Discourses like these, which emphasize the phenomena of television “addiction” suggest ways that the device inspires anti-social behavior. Indeed, popular wisdom of the time often connected “addictive” television viewing to aggressive behavior in children. Such concerns followed theories resulting from social-scientific experiments on children and media, such as the famous Payne Fund Studies in the 1930s, which characterized mass media as injecting their ideas into passive victims.<sup>54</sup>

Steiner further notes themes of violence, education, and babysitting in adult audience responses on television and the family. He cites an article in a leading women's magazine of the time which asserts that television is a device of social pressure that leads young minds to conclude that violence is a socially acceptable way of life. This writer, in *Ladies' Home Journal*, calls television a form of “American brainwashing.”<sup>55</sup> Viewers also note, during this time, on the more positive side, that parents who favor television find that the device can be intellectually educational for their children.<sup>56</sup> Other parents emphasize that they are able to find freedom and relief for themselves in the domestic

---

<sup>54</sup> See Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller, “Aftermath: The Summaries and Reception of the Payne Fund Studies,” in *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy*.

<sup>55</sup> Steiner, *People Look at Television*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

sphere by occupying their children with television programming. Some expressed pleasure in the idea that the television keeps the children in the safety of the home and away from possible trouble outside of it. Steiner also found, parallel with many responders' concerns about representations of violence, that parents generally worried that television was exposing their children to "things they shouldn't see," contributing to a broader fear of television's "bad influence."<sup>57</sup> He quotes one parent stating, "You read in the paper where the kids are shooting each other or hanging by the neck, that they've seen on TV."<sup>58</sup>

It is within this kind of cultural discursive space, in which both anxiety and curiosity regarding the effects of mass media coalesced with advertising efforts to promote the new medium and its products, that Rogers developed his own views and perspectives on the subject. Rogers, too, appears to view media with an air of both skepticism and wonderment in his dedication to understanding the ways that the new technology of television effects ethical and emotional development, culture, community, and human relationships.

Interestingly, the image of the "Telebugeye" is infused with a negativity of regression that stands in contrast with Rogers' assessment of the mesmerizing power of television in the metaphor of the suckling baby at the mother's breast. While Rogers recognizes in the power of the medium to mesmerize, the potential for an ethical and emotional area of growth and positive development, the depiction of the "Telebugeye" communicates an image of regression, disarray, and sloth that results from the absorption of the viewer into an alienated and dehumanized subject. Here it would seem that

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



television can be harnessed for the dehumanization of persons rather than for any educational or uplifting endeavor. Instead of the child becoming emotionally and ethically intelligent, the television has made the “Telebugeye” stupid-looking; it has even deformed him physically, for it has made his eyes deform to look like those of an insect. It has made it a real prisoner, for it never goes into “the fresh air.” It has lost its gender identity. Its physical and mental growth has become retarded. Thus, the “Telebugeye” embodies all of the fears expressed by those wary of television’s alienating and dehumanizing force.

### **Redeploying the Pastoral Ideal**

The contrast between the television as the “nurse” or “new baby” in the family and the “Telebugeye” can be understood in the context of the discourses of praise and concern regarding the emergence of industrial machines as noted by historian Leo Marx. Writing in 1964, Marx examines Perry Miller’s concept of *the technological sublime*<sup>59</sup> in his book, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America*. Marx looks at how canonical writers dealt with the machine’s challenges to the dominant agrarian/pastoral ethos. He focused his discussion on nineteenth century technologies such as the locomotive and the telegraph, positing that they were viewed as “sublime” because they at once appeared to overshadow and dominate both the individual and the vast, romanticized American pasture.<sup>60</sup> This overshadowing and domination of the

---

<sup>59</sup> See Zoltán Simon, *The Double-edged Sword: The Technological Sublime in American Novels Between* (Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2003), 19. David E. Nye also sees Miller as the root in his *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), xv.

<sup>60</sup> See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

individual was of special concern in regard to conceptions of work, an aspect of human life ascribed with the highest virtue in several American Protestant traditions. Thus, as industrial machinery took human creativity and reward out of the working person's experience, concerns arose about the dehumanizing effects of such mechanized jobs. Could the worth of each individual be seen in factory settings where industrial machines performed the work formerly done by human hands and manual labor? How could a hard-working individual find satisfaction and value in a system where his everyday work practices were reduced to unskilled, repetitive actions ostensibly mimicking the movements of industrial machines? The questions, raised during and after the emergence of industrial life, concern the replacement of the worker by a machine. The question raised by radio and television, as machines within the family that does not perform work like a washing machine but that entertains and disseminates information, constitutes a radical shift from the concerns of industrialization. The insertion of this "domestic machine" in the intimacy of the home marks a qualitative shift from a consideration of a machine engaged in doing work to a machine engaged in the construction of subjectivity. While one could argue that this domestic artifact is not unlike the book in its ability to construct and influence subjectivity, radio and especially television are markedly different from the literary medium in their orality and the visceral, socio-emotional power of such embodied communication.<sup>61</sup> Those who praise, as well as those who suspect the power of this new machine, recognize in it its potential for supplanting teachers and parents in the production of the "subject."

---

<sup>61</sup> See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*; Horton and Wohl. "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction."

The replacement of the worker by the machine provoked a romantization of an agricultural society in which the relationship of the producer and the object produced was not mediated by the machine. Thus, the relationship of the artisan to the production of his craft is praised and highlighted as the preferential option in comparison to the mechanized worker, who is now tied to the machine, and whose work involves zero individual creativity or craftsmanship. In this sense, one can link the neighborly, small town setting of *MRN* to the idealization of a society in the early stages of industrialization where the relationship of the worker to the factory has not yet reached the generalized impersonal relationships of the advanced industrial age. A kind of simultaneous effort to place value into the integrity of human work while embracing new industrial technologies can be seen in various elements of Rogers' philosophy and programming as he clearly rejects the alienating conditions of the worker as an appendix to the machine.

Perhaps, Rogers is artfully expressing what Leo Marx identified as "the middle landscape," or, in modern capitalist times, "the garden." As Marx explains in *The Machine and the Garden*, the middle landscape belonged to the topography of the pastoral scene famously described by Virgil in the *Eclogues*, where a shepherd tends to his flock in pastures located between the city and the natural wilderness. Man here, lives in nature, but of a cultivated nature set apart from the chaotic and threatening wilderness. It is here, in this middle landscape where serenity lies, as expressed in literary works up until the eighteenth century, Marx tells us. It is at this point, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when these depictions begin to change and instead of Virgil's pasture, we see the appearance of the garden. The garden thus becomes a space where the two polarities of men (in the Western philosophical tradition) – the rational and the

wild/emotional (animalistic) – can find reconciliation.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, this analogy works quite well for thinking about *MRN*, a space where children are called to visit to participate in their own kind of “taming.” That is to say that this appears to correlate with the primary aim of Rogers’ *Neighborhood*, which he articulated in 1969 as a project that could do a great “service for mental health.” The *Neighborhood*, as middle landscape, thus embodies both the artificiality of the city and the cultivated naturalness of the pastoral, leaving out the wild threats of the wilderness. As such, it is an ideal stage for the project of “taming” the young.

As illustrated on *MRN*, Rogers’ understanding of the relationship of the human subject to work offers a countervailing sense of the value of the person in relation to work.<sup>63</sup> Rogers places the person at the center of production, above both the machine and the object produced. Hedda Sharapan, a long-time producer of *MRN*, has highlighted the way Rogers made a point of showcasing and celebrating the role of the person in industrial and creative production in both demonstrations of play and visits to adult workplaces such as factories and small businesses. She recalls that during an early program in which Rogers visits a crayon factory, he introduced the segment by saying, “let’s see how crayons are made.” Soon after the production of this segment, she noted that he shifted his language to make the human person the agent of action in workplace visits. “He started saying, instead of ‘how sneakers are made,’ it was ‘how people make sneakers.’”<sup>64</sup> Here, we can see an effort being made towards a kind of anthropocentric

---

<sup>62</sup> Michael S. Mahoney, “Technology and the Democratic Ideal: The Search for a Middle Landscape,” Princeton University, <https://www.princeton.edu/~hos/h398/midland.html>.

<sup>63</sup> I devote my discussion in chapter three to a detailed unpacking of Rogers’ emphasis on object relations and creative work as a major focus of his program.

<sup>64</sup> Hedda Sharapan, telephone interview with the author, 12 June, 2015.

industrialism, in which new technologies are embraced, but the worker remains centrally valued as the primary contributor to the material creation. This understanding of work and its connection to the person seems to hark back to the American small town mythos, in which industry had not yet displaced the artisan and where personal relations among the members of the community offset any kind of deep alienation present in the “Telebugeye” illustration. Rogers’ sense of the person was no doubt influenced by his formative years growing up in the small town of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, where his elders were highly active and regarded in community life. These elders, who were in fact industry owners, appear to have been concerned with the livelihood of their workers, extolling a kind of “compassionate capitalism” if you will. Both Rogers’ father and grandfather were industrialists, well-regarded for their treatment of workers and for their active and personal engagement in the community of Latrobe’s well-being.

Latrobe is especially interesting in regards to our discussion of the tensions between the agrarian and industrial in American history and literature because of its historical transformation. Latrobe was founded in 1852 by a civil railroad engineer named Oliver Barnes, who bought a 140-acre farm from Thomas Kirk in the hopes of connecting the eastern part of the state with the city of Pittsburgh. Although the city of Latrobe is a phenomenon of industrialization, the Latrobe area is, like much of Western Pennsylvania, an area constituted by old, agrarian farming communities. Barnes donated three acres of his land to establish a railroad station, a water tower, and a hotel. The city’s proximity to the railroad and to Loyahanna Creek helped attract the interest of industrial businessmen who quickly established a paper mill, tanneries, distilleries, and breweries.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> “Latrobe Area History, 1800-1899,” <http://www.greaterlatrobe.net/history/1800.htm>.

Indeed, Latrobe is the living example of what Marx identified in American literature as the disruptive threat that impinges upon the serene pastoral terrain – the railroad (e.g., in Thoreau’s *Walden* and Hawthorne’s “Sleepy Hollow”). But, as Michael S. Mahoney points out, the industrial machine (e.g., railroad in *Walden*, steamship in *Huckleberry Finn*, tryworks in *Moby Dick*) threatens more than anyone’s personal safety or the tranquil sense of place; it threatens the middle landscape as a way of life. Indeed, even Thomas Jefferson rallied against the establishment of manufacturing in the United States, writing that “those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God” and that such work begets the kind of “substantial and genuine virtue” necessary to “preserve the vigor of the republic.” Further, he wrote, “manufacturing is, in short to the American garden what the snake was to Eden.”<sup>66</sup> This analysis of industrialism’s threat to man is most interesting in regards to Rogers’ treatment of the creative arts, object-relations, and artisanal work, which I will discuss in the third chapter. Interestingly, Rogers celebrates both artistry and craftsmanship *and* the roles that workers play in the mechanized creation and distribution of products in industrialized settings. He constantly illustrates his high regard for human work while simultaneously failing to address the monotonization and alienation tied to factory work.

Rogers, born in 1928, was the only son of James Hillis Rogers and Nancy McFeely Rogers.<sup>67</sup> He was raised in the Presbyterian Church where both his mother and father were highly active.<sup>68</sup> James was an elder of the First Presbyterian Church’s board

---

<sup>66</sup> See Mahoney.

<sup>67</sup> The mailman character of “Mister McFeely” on *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* is named after Rogers’ maternal grandfather, Fred McFeely. Rogers was very close to McFeely during his childhood and upbringing.

<sup>68</sup> Margaret Mary Kimmel and Mark Collins, *The Wonder of It All: Fred Rogers and the Story of an Icon* (Latrobe, PA: Fred Rogers Center, 2008), 6.

of trustees. After a short career in business, James became president of the First National Bank, vice president of his father-in-law's McFeely Brick Company, and vice president and treasurer of the Latrobe Die Casting Company.<sup>69</sup> The family was very prosperous, valued hard work, and made an effort to treat their workers well. According to Hedda Sharapan,

[Fred Rogers'] father was known as someone in the community who really respected and cared for his workers. I think the word was that every now and then there were thoughts about union but they trickled away because he was so caring to them....That whole sense of caring for and respecting your workers – Fred grew up in that world.<sup>70</sup>

Rogers' mother, Nancy, was well known in the community for her volunteerism and concern with social justice, eventually becoming a nurses' aid. She knit sweaters for the American troops during the War.<sup>71</sup> According to Fr. Douglass Nowicki, the current Archabbot of St. Vincent College and a longtime friend of Fred Rogers, the College had a large fire in 1963 to which James and Nancy Rogers responded by creating a foundation to help people in need in the community.<sup>72</sup>

Set in the nearby, larger city of Pittsburgh in the 1960s, *MRN* depicts elements of both industrial and agrarian culture and values. Rogers' now famous handmade cardigan sweaters, which he wore in every single episode, are notable as a fleeting piece of

---

<sup>69</sup> James Hillis Rogers, Rootsweb, an ancestry.com community, <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/PAFAYETT/2002-10/1035728695>.

<sup>70</sup> Sharapan, telephone interview with the author, June 12, 2015. It is important to note that this dynamic could also be read as an underhanded union-busting approach. That is to say the one could read Rogers' sense of paternalism strictly as an anti-union strategy. Viewed this way, Rogers' actions seem farther removed from an ethos of benevolence and closer to acts of self-interest and power maintenance.

<sup>71</sup> Kimmel and Collins, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Fr. Douglass Nowicki, March 21, 2013. According to Nowicki, Nancy was very active in community outreach through the Presbyterian Church. The family, Nowicki said, "always had a very good relationship with the Catholic monks" at Saint Vincent. Nowicki noted that from the proceeds from their Die Casting Company, which was an economic foundation of the city, the Rogers "would set aside a certain amount for charitable distributions." Initially, these charitable donations were small but as they brought in more money, they were later able to give, according to Nowicki, "\$1 million a year. . . . Quite a lot for a local foundation."

residual, pre-industrial culture wherein everyday wear attire was often sewn by mothers and grandmothers, rather than by textile machines. In fact, all of the sweaters worn on *MRN* by Fred Rogers were made by his mother and given to him as Christmas gifts throughout his life.<sup>73</sup>

A communicative ethos that juxtaposes the fast-paced nature of industrial life with the slower-paced living characteristic of an agrarian culture is also resonant in *MRN* and represented most clearly in the figure of Mr. Rogers' mailman, "Mr. McFeeley." McFeeley makes visits to both Rogers' home and to the fantasy world of the "Neighborhood of Make Believe" on nearly every episode. His imminent arrival is often communicated to the audience and to the host character of Mr. Rogers by a change in background music from a settling and moderately-paced piano overlay to a staccato, upbeat, and rapid piano-led interlude.

---

<sup>73</sup> To add further meaning to these handmade sweaters, it is notable that Nancy not only sewed these articles of clothing for her family, but also for American troops during World War II (as noted earlier). One of the most prominent romantic agrarians in the 1920s, Ralph Borsodi, critiqued the factory that symbolized modern life in *This Ugly Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1929). "Robbing the worker, his wife, and his children, or their contact with the soil," Borsodi wrote, "depriving them of intimacy with growing things . . . and destroying their capacity for fabricating things for themselves and of entertaining and educating themselves" (Borsodi, <http://soilandhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/0303critic/030302borsodi.ugly/030302borsodi.ch6.html>). In contrast to factory life, such artisanal efforts like Nancy Rogers' sweater project in which human labor and product exchange is personal and imbued with an affect of care, were highly valued by romantic agrarianists. In this process, human work and trade operates outside the capitalist model – no money exchanges hands, and no profit-seeking intermediary exists in the process of creating and trading. Liberty Hyde Bailey, of the Country Life Movement, condemned the city for being "parasitic . . . elaborate and artificial" (*The Outlook to Nature*, rev. ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1991], 54). In contrast, he praised "the plain and frugal living of plain people" (91). See also James Kates, "Liberty Hyde Bailey, Agricultural Journalism, and the Making of the Moral Landscape," *Journalism History* 36.4 (2011): 207-17. Rogers' ritual donning of his mother's handmade sweaters appears to symbolize larger values of personalized relations, "plain and frugal living," caring for the other, and work – all of which are characteristics of a romantic agrarian ethos. In his article, Danbom notes the 1930s critique on the impact of industrialization in the South by the Nashville Agrarians, associated with Vanderbilt University. He quotes the 1988 work of Paul Conkin, who wrote extensively about southern agrarianism during this period. Conkin describes their document as "a metaphorical way of drawing contrast between a society organized solely for the purpose of producing and acquiring material goods . . . and one that might find better means of fulfilling the rational and spiritual . . . needs of man conceived in a fuller human dimension" (Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* [Ithaca, NY: American Historical Association, 1995], 295).



McFeeley announces himself by repeating the phrase “Speedy Delivery” in an urgent, almost anxious manner. The juxtaposition between Rogers’ slow, calm aura within his modest home and McFeeley’s excitable entrance onto the scene at the front door is somewhat startling; but Rogers always reacts to McFeeley’s arrival with a smile and a hint of moderate excitement so as to reassure his audience of the non-threatening nature of his fast-paced guest. He treats McFeeley’s arrival not as an unwelcomed disturbance, which would be easy to do given the interruptive nature of the event, but rather as a moment that calls for a disciplined social adjustment wherein Rogers calmly and graciously turns his attention from interpersonal dialogue with the viewer towards greeting McFeeley at the door, all the while maintaining an inclusive discourse whereby he holds both McFeeley and the viewer in his communicative gaze. Rogers greets McFeeley at the door with a warm smile, indicating his pleasure at seeing McFeeley. The two have a brief exchange wherein Rogers receives the mail and McFeeley emphasizes that he is on a schedule and must soon be on his way. They say goodbye to one another, Rogers smiling genuinely throughout the exchange, and McFeeley exits the scene.

The presence of the mailman is a sign of those outside the walls of the home and surrounding neighborhood that is the program’s imagined community. As such, the mail system puts people in contact with those who are not physically present. Historically speaking, Rogers appears to be recapitulating here an iconic scene of the arrival of mail via the train which disrupts the rhythms of the older, sleepy agrarian community. As Ronald Zboray writes in *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (1993):

Before rail, information from the outside world came into most communities bit by bit, depending on the weather, the season, the state of

the roads, or the dispositions of drivers and canal men. Those limitations looked back to an agrarian age, when time intertwined with nature's cycles. In most communities, "industrial time," wedded to the clock, arrived not with clocktowers of manufacturers but with the whistles of locomotives.<sup>74</sup>

Rogers' joyful reception of the messenger, who brings news from those who are not physically present enlarges the child's imagined community and constitutes a significant representation and intervention of the industrial characteristics of modern life, e.g. imagined community, speed, the collapsing of time and space through rapid communications.

Although McFeeley brings messages to Rogers from persons who are outside the purview of Rogers' home, Rogers and McFeeley have a substantial, embodied relationship. They know one another and they greet each other with the proper "How are you?" and engage in small talk. Though their relationship is constituted by labor and service, they treat one another as neighbors, that is to say, they acknowledge each others' personhood and express care and concern for the others' well-being. The symbolic representation of this interaction can be read not only as a contrast between a fast, industrial culture and an older and slower agrarian one, but also as a pedagogical representation of the demarcation of home/private and public life – a divide carried over from Victorian culture where the home space is characterized by peace, quiet, intimacy, the spiritual, and a relief from the rapid pace and high demands of public life.<sup>75</sup> Still, the relationship is a fixture of the program and as such serves to connect the two worlds

---

<sup>74</sup> Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>75</sup> Christopher Lasch famously called the home space of the family "a haven in a heartless world" in his book by the same name. See Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

together in a human and neighborly way. In a neighborhood, people know one another by name and engage with each other when they have encounters with one another. This contrasts with the alienating forces of urbanization and industrialization in which individuals tend to live in varying degrees of anonymous isolation.<sup>76</sup>

Rogers iconographic use of the “neighborhood,” aesthetically expressed in the setup of small houses and cottages, constitute the program’s outer set concept and can be understood to some extent within the context of an American mythos that romanticized a return to nature (e.g. Thomas Cole, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, upper class Americans began building homes outside of the city, in the country, where they sought privacy and aesthetic beauty.<sup>77</sup> Middle class men and women gradually followed this exodus just as mass public transportation provided them with the opportunity to live farther and farther away from the places of work.<sup>78</sup> In his book, *American Dreamscape* (2000), Martinson identifies three kinds of freestanding suburbs that emerged in the late nineteenth century – “the isolated refuge of the Nobility and Gentry,” the Company Town, and the Arcadian village – the latter of which appears to be most relevant to our discussion of Rogers’ romanticized, neighborhood environment.

---

<sup>76</sup> For scholarship on community theory, see Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, ed. and trans. Charles P. Loomis (1887; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), and Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). For discussion of community and individual commitment in the American democratic project, see Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald Bevan (1835; New York: Penguin Classics, 2003); Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); and Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (1985; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). For discussion on the growing alienation in twentieth century American life, see David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor, 1967); and Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).

<sup>77</sup> Tom Martinson, *American Dreamscape: The Pursuit of Happiness in Postwar Suburbia* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000), 18.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

The *Arcadian village* was intended to be peaceful, simple, and unadorned in taste. Martinson calls it “an archetypal yeoman environment” in which comfortably sized houses were set on relatively large lots.<sup>79</sup> Like Rogers’ “television home,” Arcadian domestic structures usually have front and side porches (Rogers has a large front porch with a bench swing) and are set back from a street landscaped with lush bushes, grass, and trees. Martinson describes Arcadian neighborhood blocks as “peaceful and inviting” and asserts that Arcadian villages are “highly romantic environments, in part because of the relaxed visual interplay between house and landscape.”<sup>80</sup> The idea that the everyman, or the “Yeoman, as Martinson calls him, could settle in the kind of picturesque, naturalistic, and peaceful neighborhood of an Arcadian village was made a reality in this nineteenth century moment in which a kind of American suburbia inspired by the romantic movement led to the creation of land plots “featuring large individual lots for the so-called common man—the Yeoman.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, *MRN* is rooted in the aesthetic and discursive values of this “American dreamscape,” its picturesque simplicity and its egalitarian sense of social, cultural, and economic attainment.

*MRN* is set in Rogers’ modest house. The surrounding neighborhood, we learn from a camera pan of a model Arcadian “neighborhood” at the beginning of the program and during subsequent visits to neighborhood locales, is composed of houses, small businesses, and civic spaces (e.g. the library, the police station, parks) and an imaginary, fantasy realm called the “neighborhood of make-believe” (“NMB”), which constitutes the middle segment of the program. The “NMB” set mirrors Rogers’ surrounding

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 24.

neighborhood on a much smaller scale, with fantastical animal puppets and their toy-like homes, which distinguish it from reality. *MRN*'s primary environment, the home of Mister Rogers, seems most appropriate for the viewing of very small children, as it reflects the child's world – centered in and around a safe, modest American home. The program also emphasizes the presence of a larger outside world, similarly safe and modest, in its articulation of the neighborhood – the community within which the family home resides. In all of these ways, the “neighborhood” exudes the celebrated ethos of this particular American dream, articulated exceptionally well by Scott Russell Sanders when he said that the “deepest American dream is not....the hunger for money or fame; it is the dream of settling down, in peace and freedom and cooperation, in the promised land.”<sup>82</sup>

It is this concept of the American dream, presented in the American village ideal and captured in the architectural and planning aesthetic of the Arcadian village, that *MRN* depicts. In the simplicity of the neighborhood-oriented lives of Rogers and his “neighbors,” in the slow and manageable pacing of the program embodied in Rogers' speech patterns and in the steady and easy movements of people and events, this manageable village life is created on screen. Interestingly, such a setting seems characteristic of the collection of neighborhoods that makeup the city of Pittsburgh or, perhaps, Latrobe itself with its surrounding pastoral and agricultural makeup. Martinson writes that in both symbol and fact, the Arcadian village was esteemed across the board as an “ideal environment” by millions of Americans.<sup>83</sup>

This widespread conviction—whether in rural areas, small towns, or suburbs—reflected a powerful mixture of contributing influences, ranging from the Yeoman's desire for personal space, to the metaphysical value attributed to nature by the transcendentalists. For the average American,

---

<sup>82</sup> Scott Russell Sanders, *Writing From the Center* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 49.

<sup>83</sup> Martinson, *American Dreamscape*, 23.

hopeful that the new republic was indeed a better place, an appreciation of the preeminence of nature went hand-in-hand with the characteristic optimism of the romantic movement and its emphasis on creative exploration and personal freedom.<sup>84</sup>

The interplay of these American idyllic virtues about “creative exploration” and “personal freedom” and their embeddedness within this pre-suburban, romantic aesthetic is recognizable in the visual, performative, and discursive rhetoric of *MRN*.

It is likely, given the fact that Rogers, who contextualized his television programs as part and parcel of communication within the culture of the family and the setting of the home, was conscious of the fact that his program would likely reach an intergenerational audience (and not just very young children). Indeed, his emphasis on efforts to improve mental health<sup>85</sup> dovetail with this romantic aesthetic representation of a simpler, slower, neighborly-oriented existence articulated in the pastoral mythos. Such pastoralism is understood to infer the existence of an idyllic, harmonious, and manageable preindustrial world that contrasts with the complexities, hardships, injustices and alienation of industrializing.<sup>86</sup>

The simple, pleasant, and manageable village-like iconography the *Neighborhood*, the straight-forward and neighborly behaviors of the characters, and the moderate pacing of human action appear designed to quell human anxieties faced by children in their efforts to master “healthy” behaviors and ways of being during their early development. They also appear poised to provide relief for adults navigating a complex, post-industrial world in which stressors resulting from urban isolation, longer

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>85</sup> In his 1972 testimony before Congress, Rogers notes his program’s ability to improve mental health in the country by “making feelings mentionable and manageable.” (American Rhetoric transcript, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fredrogerssenatetestimonypbs.htm>).

<sup>86</sup> See Marx, 3-33.

work days, the destabilization of the family (e.g. increasing divorce rates), and Cold War anxieties created collective and individual unease.

Notably, Rogers tries to integrate industrialism with the American pastoral ideal, perhaps most significantly in his visits to factories where he provides a kind of anthropology of how people make things. These film clips that detail the various mechanical production mechanisms and human work in places like a Crayon factory are interspersed with B-roll of craftsman and artisans, seemingly with the hope of calling forth the anthropocentric elements of material creation in both types of human production. Both depictions emphasize the work of human hands and the dignity of human work. Yet, as we know, the alienation of the factory worker from the product he makes and from the buyer of his product is not experienced by the artisan/craftsman. Further, the kind of satisfaction that is derived from creative, non-commodified crafting does not result from factory work. I will discuss this in depth in chapter three, “Inside *MRN*: Objects, Play, and the Cultural Dialectic.”

In *The Machine In the Garden*, Marx discusses the powerful generation and regeneration of the concept of American pastoralism within the collective imagination and thus the language of cultural symbols in the United States. It is around the same time that Rogers was developing his career in the new medium of television that Marx describes and evaluates the “uses of the pastoral ideal”<sup>87</sup> in the construction and reconstruction of the American experience. He is particularly interested in identifying the ways that this ideal “has been incorporated in a powerful metaphor of contradiction—a way of ordering meaning and value”<sup>88</sup> that elucidates the zeitgeist and inconsistencies of

---

<sup>87</sup> Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

the postwar period. “What possible bearing can the urge to idealize a simple, rural environment have upon the lives men lead in an intricately organized, urban, industrial, nuclear-armed society?”<sup>89</sup> he asks. The idea that pastoralism serves a therapeutic function for moderns, a belief shared by several influential American thinkers such as urban park designer Frederick Law Olmstead, architect Andrew Jackson Downing, philosophers John Dewey and William James, and historian T.J. Lears, persuasively responds to Marks’ question if we consider that the pastoral imaginary has been articulated in such American classics as Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, the poetry of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Henry Adams’ *The Education of Henry Adams* and his *Virgin and The Dynamo*.<sup>90</sup> This point appears most relevant to our understanding of Rogers’ project in its discursive efforts to present to young and older viewers alike, a world that is human-centered, manageable, deeply connected to nature, and full of wonder in its ability to nurture curiosity and creativity. Now I will situate an important part of Rogers’ imaginary within the tradition of the American pastoral.

I argue that Rogers’ redeployment of the American pastoral includes an attention to the moral, emotional, and spiritual benefits that agricultural life and culture convey to the individual. David Danbom, in his 1991 article, “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America,” makes a distinction between two types of agrarianism that emerged in American life. The first, he identifies as “rational agrarians,” those following the tradition of the Physiocrats in Ancient Greece and Jefferson in the American colonies who

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>90</sup> The title of Marx’s book, *The Machine in the Garden*, refers to the resonant trope that is the primary subject of analysis in the book – the disruption of the natural American landscape by grand and new technological machines such as the steam locomotive.



emphasize the “tangible contributions” that agriculture and agrarian culture make to the broader wellbeing of the nation and its political sphere. The second, he terms “romantic agrarians,” who are ostensibly disciples of Thoreau and concentrate on the “moral, emotional, and spiritual benefits” that agricultural life and culture convey to the individual. I posit that Rogers expresses this *romantic* agrarian view of life that has been developed and intertwined with an industrial, postwar suburban ethos.<sup>91</sup>

The ideology of romantic agrarianism has been employed as a vehicle for criticizing industrial capitalism.<sup>92</sup> It became extremely popular at the turn of the twentieth century, when American culture was undergoing a vast “sea-change” in which the dominance of factory work and commercial values were bleeding into human relations in every sphere of life. This “sea-change” is articulated effectively by Alan Trachtenberg’s image of American culture as not only industrialized but “incorporated.” It led to the “deterioration of the authority of traditional social institutions.” Just like when new technologies of communication were introduced – radio, television, film – many accepted and welcomed such changes while others resisted it. Part of the resistance took place by way of a framework of romantic agrarianism, which promoted a return to traditional values. Other parts took the form of unionizing. Some became radicalized. Others embraced Populism, which was agrarian, to a fault.<sup>93</sup> The *Neighborhood* seems to embrace the nostalgia of romantic agrarianism as a subset of its redeployment of the

---

<sup>91</sup> Please note that here I posit that Rogers deploys a *romantic* agrarian ethos on *MRN*. The adjective, *romantic*, implies that an imaginative and idyllic lens transforms the actual reality and complexity of agrarian life into a mythic ideal.

<sup>92</sup> David B. Danbom, “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America,” *Agricultural History* 65, no. 4 (1991): 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

American pastoral.

### **Responding to Exigencies in Postwar America**

It is important to understand Rogers' emphasis on the goal of helping children (and adults) "manage" their feelings,<sup>94</sup> not only from a child-development perspective but also from this broader social, economic, and cultural context of American history and the challenges and anxieties of that time. In regards to the more immediate socio-historical context, Rogers created *MRN* during an increasingly tumultuous time in modern American history – the 1960s. As Todd Gitlin keenly summarizes in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987), the disruptive movements of this decade – the birth of the New Left, the hippies, the Civil Right Movement, the assassinations of key public figures on the Left, the sexual revolution, youth rebellion, and second wave feminism – grew out of an immediate postwar decade characterized by affluence and abundance.

During the 1950s, a rhetoric of renewal and rebirth was trumpeted by a mass media made increasingly influential by the introduction of the television into the home environment. A return to the intertwining of a cultivated nature and civilization was embraced by the creation and settlement of suburbs, which sought, once again, to offer relief to urban life. Shopping centers and automobiles brought about the possibility of unlimited consumption. Improved roads promised to finally unite the large landmass of the country and inspired a sense of endless individual freedom of movement. A "flush of

---

<sup>94</sup> Rogers work was informed by the work of the philosopher, Jean Piaget. According to Margaret A. Boden, Piaget's study of children's development resulted in his advocacy of "school revision and classroom organization toward greater reliance on the child's spontaneous learning by way of concrete activities and self-regulation" (*Jean Piaget* [Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1975], 2). "Self-regulation" became one of the central tenets of the child development school of thought that McFarland is associated with. For more on self-regulation, see A. S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (McLean, VA: Hart Publishing, 1961), and the work of Erich Fromm.

prosperity,” an unprecedented acquisition of consumer goods, and a thrill of military victory combined to produce a zeitgeist of national glory, success, wealth, and freedom from the fears and anxieties brought about by the Depression and World War. “The idea of America had long been shaped by the promise of opportunity in the land of plenty but at long last the dream seemed to be coming true,” Gitlin writes.<sup>95</sup> But underneath the surface of this “affluent state of mind”<sup>96</sup> and the rewarding payoffs for hard work and a willingness to accept authority lay anxieties and frustrations about the changes and costs of the new status quo.

Bestselling books of the period written by prominent social critics reflected the more distressing phenomena of the new mass culture. Indeed, the popularity of their assessments demonstrates the resonance of their ideas with the larger population. In 1950, David Riesman’s book, *The Lonely Crowd*, decried a new shift in the American social character in which he posited that individuals were relying less on the influences of the past authorities in their kin/group to inform their own conduct of affairs and more on that of their peers. Gideon Lewis-Kraus puts *The Lonely Crowd*’s main claim quite succinctly when he writes that Riesman thought that

Contemporary society....was best understood as chiefly ‘other-directed,’ where the inculcated authority of the vertical (one’s lineage) gives way to the muddle authority of the horizontal (one’s peers). The inner-directed person orients herself by an internal ‘gyroscope,’ while the other-directed person orients herself by ‘radar.’<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 13.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “Yelp and the Wisdom of ‘The Lonely Crowd,’” *The New Yorker*, 7 May, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/yelp-and-the-wisdom-of-the-lonely-crowd>.

Riesman's critique speaks to a number of emerging characteristics of mass society, including a deterioration of tradition, the decreasing authority of the family,<sup>98</sup> the increasing authority of the mass media,<sup>99</sup> and the decline of intergenerational interactivity. Indeed, the less radical critics of the period were in agreement that "authentic community and tradition were being flattened by a mass society," an issue Rogers quite obviously seeks to address on *MRN* through the representation of the "neighborhood" as community.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to the "flattening" of the sense of community was an equally important concern about the "flattening" of the individual. While earlier decades brought about anxieties over ways industry was doing this to workers, especially in factories where individuals performed like cogs in a larger machine, 1950s corporate culture was producing a similar type of numbing of middle class, white collar workers. The banality of a work life in which one's work is not one's own but instead belongs to an autonomous company who essentially owns one's time and labor was producing what C. Wright Mills called the ebbing of a once independent middle class.

In his 1951 book, *White Collar*, Mills laments the rise of a sales mentality, in which a deadening culture of rationalization and bureaucratization reigns, and the death of a middle class formerly employed by more entrepreneurial practices such as small manufacturing, retail, and farming. These former middle class professions, Mills decries, have been replaced by managers, salaried professionals, salespeople, and office workers –

---

<sup>98</sup> See Lasche.

<sup>99</sup> See Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 1957); Roland Machand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and McChesney, *Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

<sup>100</sup> Gitlin, 19.

all of which require these middle class workers to forfeit their liberty and authority to those higher on the corporate ladder. As articulated well by Steven Rytina, “the angst of the frontier-bred free spirit pounded into the corporate cage made a timely theme” for Mills and other critics identifying these new, constraining structural changes in society that are affecting people at both the individual and collective levels.<sup>101</sup>

As Gitlin notes, later in the decade, muckrakers like Vance Packard, John Keats and John Kenneth Galbraith “scraped at the surface of the consumer society” and published their works for an interested mass readership. In *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), Packard exposes the manipulative strategies of advertising executives who exploit consumer anxieties. John Keats critiques the 1950s “chrome car culture”<sup>102</sup> and its celebration of the period’s arguably irrational consumptive practices of the middle class in *The Insolent Chariot* (1958), by showing how the average man earning less than \$5,000 per year pays something like \$1,250 per year in car payments. That same year, John Kenneth Galbraith hoisted a critical spear into the “giddiness” of the culture of abundance in his *The Affluent Society* by illustrating how while the United States was becoming more wealthy in the private sector, it continued to be poor in the public sector, charging that public services were being starved.

I would posit that Rogers does his own work of social critique on *MRN* by emphasizing the importance of human relationships and creative work over displays of wealth, glamour, and automation. In contrast to the glossy portrayals of the culture of affluence in the visual media of the time, *MRN* exhibits an aesthetic of simplicity,

---

<sup>101</sup> Steven Rytina, “Youthful Vision, Youthful Promise, Through Midlife Bifocals: C. Wright Mills’ ‘White Collar’ Turns 50,” *Sociological Forum* 16.3 (2001): 563.

<sup>102</sup> See the Kirkus review of *The Insolent Chariot*, 17 Sep. 1958, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/john-keats-2/the-insolent-chariots/>.

frugality, and moderation. Each episode focuses on creative abilities of persons, with Rogers introducing an everyday object to the viewer on nearly every episode and then showing how it can be manipulated and interpreted within the social context in several different ways. No object is branded and, due to the non-commercial uniqueness of the initial PBS project, no advertisements are run during or in between the program's running time. Moreover, Rogers often makes a point of tracing the object back to its origins in nature, celebrating the natural world and its gifts. Few, if any, consumptive practices are evident on the program.

In addition to object use and manipulation, Rogers celebrates the performative arts, such as music, dance, theater, by showcasing a plethora of visiting artists who not only discuss their art form from the perspective of personal origins and cultural relevancy, but demonstrate it on screen. The focus on these enriching and rewarding human activities contributes to an emphasis on the range of creative expressions—expressions that take form without any need to buy something—that constitute the program's ethos. Such emphasis certainly works to counter the practices and values of “organization man,” whose banal office tasks and focus on a dehumanizing obsession with productivity are arguably contributing to the flattening and narrowing of human subjectivities.

Another one of Rogers' aims is to provide viewers with models for coping in this dramatically changed and changing postwar world.<sup>103</sup> He does this not only through empathic verbal messaging and a focus on creative work, which we now know reduces

---

<sup>103</sup> In his 1972 Yale speech, Rogers writes, “our communication is designed to keep anxiety within manageable limits and then to deal with it. We attempt to provide models of coping – in simple ways” (“Yale,” 2).

the levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) in the brain,<sup>104</sup> but also through the visual rhetoric of the show's pastoral-inspired, neighborhood setting. Visually, the *Neighborhood* focuses less on elements of busy images of urban, industrial life, e.g. cars, the rapid movement of people and vehicles, construction, etc., and more on the quiet and peaceful space of the home during daytime hours. Through this lens of the home (as refuge), the program is constituted as a tranquil and friendly space inside of a quiet, slow-paced village attuned to the speed and rhythms of the body. It is a village in which people walk, ride bikes, or hop on the sole trolley that navigates along the neighborhood streets. There seems to be a "soft-veil of nostalgia" operating in the *Neighborhood* that, while it is not a complete return to the pastoral, functions in dialogue with it.<sup>105</sup>

To be sure, a prominent foundational element of *MRN* is the establishment of a "safe space," away from the "hustle and bustle" of public life in which both Rogers and his audience can be together inside his quiet, welcoming home, set within a friendly neighborhood environment of small houses. Rogers makes clear his intent in creating this "safe space" within the domestic environment in a document entitled, "Philosophy," which I will discuss later in the chapter. Although child development psychology is likely behind this aesthetic move toward the creation of a "safe space," it is also important to note the psychology of the suburb as a pastoral-inspired setting of relief from the industrialized city as influential. Tom Martison calls Arcadia "a place of pastoral peace

---

<sup>104</sup> See Heather L. Stuckey and Jeremy Nobel, "The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 2 (2010): 254-63.

<sup>105</sup> Marx notes an array of visual representation in film and television during the postwar period. Noting the prevalence of pastoral narratives in postwar advertising and films (e.g., TV westerns, Norman Rockwell magazine covers, the use of rustic settings to sell beer and tobacco), Marx writes that "Each does express something of the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence 'closer to nature,' that is the psychic root of all pastoralism – genuine and spurious. . . . The soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape is largely a vestige of the once dominant image of an undefiled, green republic, a quiet land of forests, villages, and farms dedicated to the pursuit of happiness" (Marx, 6).

and simplicity” and notes that “this is a psychological place as well as a physical space.”<sup>106</sup> If we consider Marx’s theories on American pastoralism, and the philosophies and psychology behind the creation of these suburbs that involve an understanding of home life as a peaceful refuge from the toils of city work life, it would appear that these efforts to create a ‘safe space’ emerge more broadly from a cultural discourse ripe with symbols of this pastoralism and nostalgia for a pre-industrial past that seeks to quell collective adult anxieties arising from the stressors of fast-paced and demanding industrial life. However, one should not forget Rogers’ own biography, which includes a lived experience of something close to the idealization of the small town (Latrobe) within a pastoral setting (western Pennsylvania).

The interweaving of the American pastoral imaginary with the galloping growth of industrial life is historically tied to rise of political Progressivism during the mid-late nineteenth century. The heart of this political movement sought to employ government as an agency of human welfare in addressing the problems caused by industrialization and urbanization.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English note that even “revolution,” in the term “industrial revolution” is “too pallid a word” as “people were wrested from the land suddenly, by force; or more subtly, by the pressure of hunger and debt—uprooted from the ancient security of family, clan, and parish.”<sup>108</sup> In response to this widespread uprooting and the embodied feelings regarding the loss of the old world,

---

<sup>106</sup> Martinson, *American Dreamscape*, 221.

<sup>107</sup> See Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998); and Michael E. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>108</sup> Barbara Ehrenrich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of The Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978), 5.



the antimodernist<sup>109</sup> back-to-the-land movement critiqued urban-industrial society and its impact on human happiness and “right living.” Through their publication, *The Craftsman*, proponents of this movement urged Americans to leave their city and purchase acreage in the country, arguing that rural living would foster a “restoration” and recapturing of “a free and natural existence that had been lost.” In 1907, Bolton Hall, the author of *Three Acres and Liberty*, wrote, “we want to check...needless want and misery in the cities,” pointing to the harsh conditions of urban life and the creation of consumer desires by commercial interests.<sup>110</sup> During the same period, sociologist Kenyon Butterfield, of the Country Life Movement, celebrated the freedom of the farmer by waxing poetic about his ability to “read God’s classics, listen to the music of divine harmonies, and roam the picture galleries of the eternal.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, observer Liberty Hyde Bailey described the city as “parasitic...elaborate and artificial.”<sup>112</sup> Missing from Leo Marx’s understanding of these pastoral movements is the reality that the prominent Country Life Movement recognized the advancement of urban, industrial society as an unalterable reality. As such, they did not hope to eradicate it from existence, but rather to reform rural life to the extent that it could and would remain a “vital and vibrant” sector of American society in order to “continue to serve the social and economic needs of an urban nation.”<sup>113</sup> In order to achieve these aims, Country Lifers aimed to make the countryside more like the city in regards to its efficiency, sophistication, organization, and mechanization and commercialization of operations. These steps, they thought, would help preserve “the

---

<sup>109</sup> For more on antimodernism, see T. J. Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>110</sup> Danbom, “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America,” 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 4.

essence of rural life.”<sup>114</sup> A basic understanding of the agrarian movements of the early nineteenth century is useful in trying to understand Rogers’ history in the town of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, where his grandfather and father were industrialists in a once dominant agrarian community. Clearly, in Rogers’ understanding, the tension between industrialization and the social and ethical values of the agrarian community could be reconciled and negotiated in a kind of third way.

As noted earlier, many romantic agrarians identified the growing dominance of industrial and commercial values in human relations. As part and parcel of these phenomena, the transition from agrarian culture to industrial life meant significant changes for the structure of family life and the conception of the child. As Spigel writes in “Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America,” while the child in agrarian culture was essential to the family income, industrialism shifted the societal understanding of children as they were no longer directly essential to the economic survival of the family. In this new context, the child was reimagined as a “new sociological category in whom the middle-class adult culture invested new hopes and dreams.”<sup>115</sup> Under the influence of Darwin’s evolutionary theories, the child came to play a critical role in human evolution and as such, its habits and activities were no longer considered trivial matters. Rather, children became of critical importance to the survival of the entire species due to the fact that the old rural society was diminishing and a new society centered in cities and constituted economically by a new world of professions was forming.<sup>116</sup> Further, in a world changing every day due to the rapid developments in

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Spigel, “Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 112.

<sup>116</sup> Ehrenrich and English, 186.

science and technology, the child, in her ability to quickly learn new information and skills, became more important than ever for the survival and success of the family and family name into the new century.<sup>117</sup> In this new setting, the former educational methods of imitation that take place within the family (and heavily reliant on the mother and her natural abilities) setting are no longer relevant; instead, pedagogy will occur outside. Notably, a sense that the “child cannot be left to women” arises and power over the education of young children is seized by “child experts.”<sup>118</sup>

At turn of the century, as birth rates and infant mortality rates dropped, parents began to view their children more as individualized persons with distinct personalities in need of moral support and guidance.<sup>119</sup> Simultaneously, child labor practices amongst black, immigrant, and working-class families became prominent as a way to achieve some measure of familial income security. Out of this milieu, “child-saving” movements emerged out of the larger Progressive movement that attempted to address industrial practices of employing children, labeled as child abuse, through the proposal of broad political reforms for children of diverse races and classes.<sup>120</sup> This sentimentalization of the child, or as Viviana Zelizer conceptualizes it, “sacralization,” was a relatively new phenomenon in the collective structures of feeling that took place at the turn of the century. Notably, this new “sacralization” of the child led to new measures to protect them from harm, which resulted to their increased domestication and supervision<sup>121</sup> – a

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 206-7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>119</sup> In *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), Viviana Zelizer traces the transformation in economic and emotional value of children in the U.S. from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

<sup>120</sup> See David Nasaw, *Children of the City* (New York: Anchor, 1985) and Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>121</sup> See Zelizer, 22-55.

legacy that carries into Rogers historical moment and onto his program, which occurs ritually inside the safe space of the home.

At the heart of this new social shift, children were viewed as both innocents and arbiters of progress and as such, their image “was not only at the center of power struggles at home” but also served to “legitimate the institutional power of scientists, policy-makers, and media experts who turned their attention to children’s welfare.”<sup>122</sup> Such developments contributed to even more accumulation of power for men, whose occupations the public sphere now reached into the realm of childhood, a space formerly governed by women.

Now it is as if the masculinist imagination takes a glance over its shoulder and discovers it has left something important behind in ‘women’s sphere’—the child. The child—the new child of the twentieth century—is not valued, like the child of patriarchy, simply as an heir. The child is conceived as a kind of evolutionary protoplasm, a means of *control* over society’s not-so-distant future.<sup>123</sup>

This emerging social interest in the child was thus capitalized upon by men in the medical and other scientific professions who present themselves as experts in child-raising and child-development. Through sustained efforts of persuasion, in which they “wooed their female constituency,”<sup>124</sup> these agents effectively turned motherhood into a science and redirected its origins away from the innate process led by women in the home and community (e.g., mother, aunt, grandmother), toward a scientific model of expertise led by male doctors and researchers.<sup>125</sup> The relationship between such self-appointed experts and the mothers who listened to them was never one of equality as it rested on

---

<sup>122</sup> Spiegel, “Seducing the Innocent,” 113.

<sup>123</sup> Ehrenrich and English, 210.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 183.

“the denial or destruction of women’s autonomous sources of knowledge: the old networks of skill-sharing, the accumulated lore of generations of mothers.”<sup>126</sup> Within this context, women found themselves in crisis, confused about their role in the new modern world (what was it?), questioning the knowledge passed along to them during their upbringing, and finding themselves with little authority in any realm of the social order.

It is useful to think about the ways in which, decades later, Fred Rogers, child psychologist and university professor Margaret McFarland, and the *MRN* television project fit into this kind of framework regarding the rise of the child, Progressive thought and action regarding child welfare, individualism, the rise of the expert, and the reproduction of values and culture through a once emergent, now established paradigm of educating and protecting the child. As we will see, Rogers, who became a child-development expert himself in order to gain legitimacy as a producer of educational children’s television (and other multi-media material, including books, records, and pamphlets), envisioned his program as a pedagogical endeavor aimed to provide a “healthy” alternative to the content and values prominently displayed in commercial, Vaudevillian and slapstick television entertainment of the time. Moreover, he seems to be interested in providing a model of interpersonal communication exchange rooted in an older, agrarian network of human interaction in which cultivation of land, stability, continuity, and community maintenance foster the practices of neighborliness, friendship, and cooperation are reasserted as the order of the day.<sup>127</sup> Such an ethos appears aimed to

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>127</sup> See Wendell Berry, “Health is Membership,” in *The Art of the Common Place* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002) PAGE NUMBERS!; *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977); Maurice Telleen, “The Mind-Set of Agrarianism: New and Old,” in *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 52-61; and Norman Wirzba, “Placing the Soul: An Agrarian Philosophical Principle,” in *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, 80-97.

counter an ever-emerging zeitgeist constituted by the production of a competitive, survivalist, world of individual achievement characteristic of 1950s corporate culture and the age of abundance. Here we may look to an excerpt from Marx and Engels who were the first to identify the cataclysmic transformation of social relations brought about by industrial capitalism, whose ethos extends into the postwar era and a more advanced capitalism.

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.<sup>128</sup>

In this context where “an old world was dying and a new one was being born,”<sup>129</sup> Rogers appears steadfast and keen in his discursive project to recover for himself and others, the human-centered social dynamics of this old world some seventy years into the new American order of industrial capitalism, and to display this dynamic on the screen.<sup>130</sup> As we move forward in our examination of Rogers’ acquisition of discursive and artistic means of production for *MRN*, it will be important to keep in mind, from a socio-cultural perspective the language and theory of the discipline of child development.

---

<sup>128</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 476.

<sup>129</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 5.

<sup>130</sup> See Antonio Gramsci and Theodore W. Adorno for further discussion of the discursive means of production in the Marxist tradition.

## Christianity and Mass Entertainment: Tensions and Solutions

Beyond identifying Rogers' project as a redeployment of the American pastoral, given the cultural anxieties brought about by galloping industrialization, it is important to situate Rogers within the cultural and political lineage of the debates that took place between intellectuals, Christians, and the entertainment industry. As has been noted by William D. Romanowski, the struggles over the evolution of American theater involved an alliance between religious citizens and the educated wealthy elite that was held together by the dominant Victorian social system.<sup>131</sup> In response to the emergence of theatrical and later cinematic entertainment that featured Vaudevillian forms<sup>132</sup> of artistic

---

<sup>131</sup> William D. Romanowski, *Pop Culture Wars: Religion and the Role of Entertainment in American Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 19. For more on the making of audiences in the U.S., especially in relation to socio-historical dynamics of passivity/activity and participation/resistance, see Richard Butsch, *Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>132</sup> Vaudeville became the dominant and most popular form of entertainment in the U.S. during the late nineteenth century and its forms carried over into twentieth century popular entertainment mediums. Douglas Gilbert identifies "the backbone of vaudeville" as "low comedy." "Dialect, eccentric, and nut comedians in exaggerated costumes and facial makeups predominated" (*American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* [New York: Dover, 1940], 393). English-born Caroline Caffin, an articulate commentator on modern culture of her day wrote about Vaudeville during the Progressive period in her book *Dancing and Dancers of Today* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1912). She discusses the skit-like nature of Vaudeville and how the structure of the program moves quickly from one act to the next in order to appeal to the diversity of the "democratic" audience. "There must be something for every one," she writes, "though the fastidious may be a little shocked, they must not be offended, while the seeker for thrills must on no account be bored by too much mildness." Furthermore, she notes, "it is the first law of the cult of Vaudeville that 'Highbrow Stuff Never Pays,'" pointing to the historical, mass culture origins of the appeal to the "lowest common denominator" in contemporary critiques of the entertainment industry. "If humor be the medium, not a single line must misfire. If it be vulgarity, it will be grosser than the audience, as individuals would stand for. You could never amuse an audience by displaying to it a specimen of skillful and minute engraving, the result of many years of toil. But let them see a cartoonist dash off a rough sketch in a few lines made before their eyes and he has secured their delight. In every case, the effect must be vivid, instantaneous and unmistakable" (Caffin, qtd. in *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America: 1830-1910* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003], 328-29). Here, Caffin captures perhaps the most apparent juxtaposition between high and low culture – the former embraces detail, artistic form, an appreciation for complexity and sophistication while the later seeks cheap thrills, instant gratification, and plays to immediate responses of the base emotion. Products of high culture require commitment of attention and patience for a moderate to slow unfolding of storyline. As articulately described in Caffin's prose, products of low culture such as Vaudeville adhere to a quick beat, move swiftly from one topic to the next, and do not allow much space for reflection or concentrated processing.

representation, these dominant forces in American life often came together to critique and decry what they often viewed as the transmission of undesirable values and tastes.

“Cultural elitists derided popular culture on grounds of aesthetic taste; religious moralists feared its influence and yearned for disciplinary control.”<sup>133</sup> What resulted from this ongoing struggle during the mid-late nineteenth century was the discursive creation of the categories of high and low culture by “the arbiters of culture” who sought to categorize and differentiate types of fare and assign them as appropriate or inappropriate to different social groups of people.<sup>134</sup>

According to Lawrence Levine, these arbiters “were convinced that maintaining and disseminating pure art, music, literature, and drama would create such a force for moral order and help to halt the chaos threatening to envelop the nation.”<sup>135</sup> Romanowski is careful to note in his discussion of this phenomena that these categories do not merely describe created products. Rather, they are “ways of thinking that affect the policies, practices, and institutions”<sup>136</sup> (e.g. schools, museums) of modern society.<sup>137</sup> “The new industrial democracy,” which included an emerging culture of abundance, popular culture, and mass entertainment, rivaled the older Victorian cultural model for dominance. This tension is illustrated well in Levine’s descriptions of the writer Henry James’ observations of a changing America represented in the face of the non-English-

---

<sup>133</sup> Romanowski, 19.

<sup>134</sup> See Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>135</sup> Levine, 200.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>137</sup> Note also that American evangelicals were at the forefront of utilizing the new mass media to promote conversion and engage in other persuasion efforts that sought to influence the public mind. See David Nord, *The Evangelical Origins of the Mass Media in America, 1815-1835* (Columbia, S.C.: Association for Education in Journalism, 1984), and Nord, *Faith in Reading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).



speaking urban immigrant of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Upon visiting Boston's Athenaeum, James came away with the following feeling of disgust: "this honored haunt of all the most civilized—library, gallery, temple of culture" had become "completely out of countenance by the mere masses of brute ugliness....It was heartbreaking."<sup>138</sup> To cultural arbiters of a formerly predominant singular, homogenous American Victorian, Anglo-Saxon culture like James, Levine notes, "it was not merely tradition that was in danger but taste itself."<sup>139</sup> It is within this conflicted setting of emerging ethnic diversity and cultural multiplicity where film, the phonograph, and the radio were born and where Victorian intellectual and religious agents experimented with different and varied ways of negotiating their cultural dominance inside this new shirting terrain of mass culture.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the notion that the U.S. was a "Christian nation" was a standard, foundational given for most Americans. Protestant leaders saw themselves as setting the norms for American public life, "relishing their status as the established religion."<sup>140</sup> These leaders' sense of authority "came with a God-given responsibility for the moral and religious character of the nation and a sacred duty to work toward its improvement."<sup>141</sup>

In general, the Protestant establishment of the early to mid-twentieth century identified its core values, with an ardent emphasis on the conscience of the individual, justice, and stewardship" as part and parcel with American democratic values. The

---

<sup>138</sup> Henry James, qtd. in Levine, 172.

<sup>139</sup> Levine, 173.

<sup>140</sup> Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood: How American Protestants Fought For Freedom at the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

preservation of these values, along with the institutions that supported and purveyed them, was of key importance to ensure the cultural reproduction of a Christian-American ethos. These dominant, but not necessarily hegemonic,<sup>142</sup> goals contained in them profound contradictions that would prove difficult to negotiate when dealing with the challenges of what would arguably become the most powerful influencing tool ever known to man – cinematic and televisual technology. According to Romanowski, the Protestant establishment “wanted social control and individual freedom, progress and traditional moral purity, corporate profits and the common good,” unaware of the fact that these binomial objectives contain irresolvable contradictions at their very core.<sup>143</sup> Questions about how to go about ensuring the reproduction of Protestant culture in America in the face of the dual rise of cinema and cultural pluralism<sup>144</sup> were prominent amongst these groups during the earlier part of the century.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> See William R. Hutchison, ed., *Between The Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>143</sup> Romanowski, 5.

<sup>144</sup> For a primary source discussion on the increasing recognition of an emerging cultural pluralism in early twentieth century America, see Randolph S. Bourne, “Trans-national America,” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1916, <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/16jul/bourne.htm>. Bourne notes that the “discovery of diverse nationalistic feelings” has “brought about the unpleasant inconsistencies of our traditional beliefs” (1).

<sup>145</sup> In her book, *American Protestants and TV in the 1950s* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), Michele Rosenthal focuses on the critical period of the 1950s and the particular challenge of television as understood by Protestants in regards to public influence. Rosenthal notes that mainline groups such as the National Council of Churches feared the persuasive power of television and treated it as a device of lowbrow entertainment full of representations of moral vice. The Council’s Broadcast and Film Commission quickly shifted from the production of religious media texts toward the dissemination of critical and advisory statements after proving unable to raise funding for programming.

<sup>145</sup> Rosenthal notes that this shift is illustrative of the group’s gradual loss of cultural power. Interestingly, I came across a typed document by Rogers, entitled “Protestant Hour,” written on 2 February, 1976. This program was never produced but the document lays out the barebones of a script which begins with the opening *MRN* song, “Won’t You Be My Neighbor.” The introductory sentence of the document reads: “It seems to me that one of our most important tasks as parents and Christian educators is to help and encourage both children and adults to discover their own unique ways of expressing love” (Fred Rogers, “Protestant Hour” transcript, 25 February, 1967, Folder “Judson Press,” Box CW11, Fred Rogers Archive, Latrobe, PA).

Romanowski notes that when cinematic content challenged the normative Protestant values, most mainline leaders and believers did not partake in boycotting or censorship efforts as some of the more conservative ones did.<sup>146</sup> Rather, because cultural separatism was not a practice typical of most Protestants, and because they understood themselves largely as “cultural caretakers responsible for securing a fitting place for movies in American life,” mainline Protestants took an integrative approach to the challenges posed by the new medium. This approach is in stark contrast to the efforts of the American Catholic Church, who saw its population gain in numbers at the beginning of the twentieth century, and whose leaders actively spoke out against representations of “immorality” in cinema, organizing efforts to censor the public displays of countless Hollywood and foreign films.<sup>147</sup> Like such Catholic leaders, however, Protestant leaders perceived early on the ways that cinema was becoming a critical tool for socialization. Since there already existed a deep desire on the part of such Protestant leaders to integrate Protestant teachings into all aspects of American life, it follows that such leaders were eager to see movie producers work “in harmony with the home, school, and church to produce a truly healthy Americanism.”<sup>148</sup> Romanowski points out that

...even if they were not always frequent moviegoers themselves, the Protestant elite recognized that film contributed to the marketplace of ideas. They saw legal censorship as un-American, undemocratic, impractical, unnecessary, and prone to political raft and corruption. At the

---

<sup>146</sup> While a body of literature including Rosenthal’s recent essay, “‘Turn It Off!’: The Liberal Protestant Critique of Television,” in *American Protestants and TV in the 1950s*, 21-36, and Paul Boyer, *Purity In Print* (New York: Scribner, 1968), speak of a kind of censorship within Protestant circles, which of course are not homogenous, it is also true that liberalism emerged from the Protestant matrix as distinct from, say, the Catholic Church of the Counter-Reformation.

<sup>147</sup> See Ellen Draper, “Controversy Has Probably Destroyed Forever In The Context: *The Miracle* and Movie Censorship in America,” in *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*, ed. Matthew Bernstein (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 187-201. See also Quentin Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).

<sup>148</sup> Romanowski, 6.

same time, they believe that a reasonable measure of self-restraint on the part of moviemakers was acceptable—even necessary—to protect the public welfare.

Clearly, the Protestant establishment did not see the depth of the dilemma that was beginning to emerge between the principles of freedom of speech and artistic expression, which clearly involved the expression of values, and their desire to see the continuation of the dominance of the Protestant ethos.<sup>149</sup> It is in the crux of this dilemma that Rogers will manage to make a televisual intervention that remains true to his Christian convictions within an increasingly secular and pluralistic public sphere.

During the decades that *MRN* ran on *PBS*, Rogers responded to questions regarding what television shows he viewed by noting that he does not actually watch television. In autobiographical recollections of his upbringing, he notes his study and playing of the piano, his special relationship to his grandfather Fred McFeely who encouraged him in this practice, his role as newspaper writer for the high school paper, his election as senior class president, and the bullying he endured as a young boy. His family was highly active in the Presbyterian church and it was expected that after graduation from college, Rogers would go into the seminary to become a Presbyterian minister. His path made a slight turn after his sophomore year of college at Dartmouth when he realized that he wanted to major in music instead of Romance Languages. He then transferred to Rollins College, a school with a more robust music program. Still, his track to seminary school continued and by his senior year in 1951, he was accepted to Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. It was not until he watched television for the first time that year, during a break from school, that he realized that he wanted to

---

<sup>149</sup> For a broader account of the travail and declension of the American Protestant establishment's cultural authority during the first half of the twentieth century, see Hutchison.

pursue creative work options in the new medium. As noted earlier, Rogers often recounts this experience noting his dual response to the television viewing. He says that he was at once fascinated by the new technology and disappointed with the representation of human behavior (pie throwing) depicted on the screen.<sup>150</sup> The initial perception of television as being exciting as a new medium and at the same time distasteful in its representation of imagery provided Rogers, so he remembers, with the motivation to pursue a career in the industry in order to create better programming. In this regard, if we consider his response within the context of his religious, elite, upper-class upbringing, Rogers appears to be a descendent of the intellectual, Protestant establishment perspective wary of mass entertainment forms.

In “Children’s TV: What The Church Can Do About It,”<sup>151</sup> Rogers which he discusses his project from a religious, ministerial perspective, Rogers asks his readers if they are aware that children see and hear an average of 3,000 hours of television before they begin their schooling and that by the time they finish schooling, they will have spent more time “with the television than they have in the classroom.”<sup>152</sup> He then asserts that, in regards to the content they will have consumed by this point in their lives, children will have seen mostly “charmingly cynic, sardonic, sadistic animated tripe with slick puns,

---

<sup>150</sup> Rogers does not specify the programming he viewed in which pie throwing occurred. *The Three Stooges*, whose “pieing” antics were featured prominently, did not appear regularly until 1958. Rogers may also have viewed pie-throwing by performers Milton Berle and Red Skelton, but not in child-oriented programming.

<sup>151</sup> This document, “Children’s TV: What The Church Can Do About It,” is not dated. We can tell that it is authored by Rogers because he signs off at the bottom of the document as “Rev. Fred Rogers, Director of the United Oakland Ministry’s Center For Creative Work With Children; Visiting Lecturer In Children’s Work, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; Consultant In Creative Media: Arsenal Child Study Center; Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburg, and Creator, writer, producer of television series: “MISTEROGERS’ NEIGHBORHOOD.” We can deduce from the spelling of the show here that the document probably was written before 1968, when the title was changed to *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*.

<sup>152</sup> Rogers, “Children’s TV: What Can The Church Do About It?”, 1.

inversions and asides.”<sup>153</sup> The negative characterization that Rogers gives to this children’s programming exceeds his earlier condemnation of Vaudevillian and Slapstick character of other programming, exemplified by pie throwing. These programs, according to Rogers, are downright insidious and seductive. Here, he is clearly raising an urgent alarm and attempting to awaken an audience that may be confusing the charm of animation and human performance with benign entertainment.

To the occasional viewer and listener children’s tv fare may seem ‘harmless’ enough: but a steady diet of the weak always magically winning and the villains always being the big ones, of people getting flattened out one second and popping into shape the next, of conniving and teasing and hurting and belittling and stopping tears with elaborate gifts...Is a steady diet of this what we would choose to feed our children’s needs?<sup>154</sup>

Rogers poses for his audience a cascade of questions designed for the church to face the facts of a now-dominant televisual culture, which it seems to continue to ignore and deny. Are parents aware that they are condoning the behavior depicted on the screen?, he asks. “Without knowing it,” he writes, “we are encouraging our children to disrespect, disobey, dispel much that we feel is important in our heritage. Are our children (and the children whom the Church has never been able to reach), being fed a slick stimulating sound-tracked<sup>155</sup> trash 1,000 hours a year while our Church schools try to teach the opposite with posters, crayons and paste in one tenth the time?” Rogers’ fears regarding children’s consumption of television are centered upon the fundamental concern that the

---

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Here, Rogers appears to be pointing to animation that entered into cinema in the 1920s and later into television (e.g. Warner Brothers, Disney). See David Perlmutter, *American Toons In: A History of Television Animation* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2014).

<sup>155</sup> Trained in music composition at Rollins College, Rogers was acutely aware of the role that music plays in perception and communication. Here, he points to the ways that musical soundtracks in the common television fare add to what he considers an overstimulation of the audience. In contrast, on *MRN*, he provides calming, complimentary, and invitational music in order to facilitate the kind of thoughtful conversations he wishes to have with his audience (See chapter 3 of this dissertation).

representations depicted on the new device undermine the education and values disseminated to children by traditional institutions – institutions that were established, in part, to communicate certain sets of knowledge to young people to aid in their development and upbringing.<sup>156</sup> He has clearly already made the decision to move into this cultural vacuum left by the church's misunderstanding of the situation and inaction.

The larger arc of Rogers' observations are corroborated by media scholar Erik Barnouw, who, in 1975 writes that television has bypassed the traditional roles of parent, teacher, priest, grandparent, etc., in its power to transmit values and other information to children.<sup>157</sup> Recognizing television's pedagogical role in society, Barnouw asserts that the device has quickly become the dominant shared experience in the modern world.<sup>158</sup> Rogers' specific concern here regards, like many critiques of the time, the undermining of the social and ethical lessons and values taught in the schools and the church.<sup>159</sup> Employing a tone of deep urgency and concern, uncharacteristic of his television persona, he writes, "we must know this...we must know that we're failing our children but, either we won't let ourselves admit it, or we think that there's nothing we as the Church can do about it." Employing the persuasion technique of problem-solution organization, Rogers, with fervor, offers a bold solution. For its values to regain a platform in American culture, the church must move beyond the limits – Protestant culture – of its institutional,

---

<sup>156</sup> For more on the relationship between the emergence of childhood and the institutions that fostered this new conception of the young, see Postman.

<sup>157</sup> Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). For a more in depth account of the history of television as understood by Barnouw, see *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States from 1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>158</sup> See Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*.

<sup>159</sup> One could also argue that, as Ronald Zboray has pointed out, television content can also be assessed as window into the "real" world characterized with all of its flaws, injustices and struggles. For immigrant youths in the U.S., for example, it could provide a lingua franca that communicates cultural knowledge across ethnic and class divides.

historical tradition. The church can no longer represent its values as solely the values of the Protestant tradition or the values of an unquestioned, dominant worldview. It must reach beyond religious, class, race, and economic differences and approach a universal child for whom it deeply cares.

There IS something we can do! But, it's not so simple (or cheap) as writing letters of complaint!irate parents who by the thousands have written to local tv stations bewailing the frenetic inferior children's fare have repeatedly received courteous curt replies: "You can always turn your television set off!" That may be true – but you can't do it without becoming the ogres in the house: just as tv has been intimating to your child that big people are! But we as the Church CAN do something very effective. We can begin to produce and promote television programs for children as an expression of caring for the children of the whole country. We can communicate to a child that he is accepted as his is: happy, sad, angry, lonely, exactly as he is. We can do what commercial broadcasters fail to do over and over again and that is to give the child a healthy choice on the television dial. I say we can because some of us already have!

Rogers' exhortation to action is not in the least utopian. He offers the church not only a plan of action, but the experience (10+ years) that he has already gained. He calls for those in the church to get involved in television production by describing the "overwhelming" positive responses his program has received since he began his work with *The Children's Corner* in 1954. In an appeal to maintain the attention of his readers through the presentation of a dire sense of urgency, Rogers prefaces his call to action with testimonies of public praise for his efforts to produce wholesome and interpersonal programming. "Please make your program longer;" "You're the only tv person who treats my children like real people;" "You're my favorite," he quotes viewers writing to him.

Toward the end of this paragraph, where Rogers calls upon his peers in the church to enter the industry of television and create programming, it is important to underscore that he does not point to explicit religious instruction nor does his program. Rather, he



urges readers to get involved in making programming that communicates care and worth to young audiences, leaving out any connection of such care to the Divine. That is to say, he removes the signifier of the divinity (i.e., Christ) from the Gospel message. By breaking out of the confines of the explicit, traditional language of Christianity, Rogers frees himself to blend Gospel teaching with a modern understanding of child development to construct a pedagogy and rhetorical framework that meets the exigency of the historical and cultural moment as he perceives it. His primary aim thus becomes helping children to feel loved and accepted as they exist within the array of feeling states experienced by all persons living in the world. From a rhetorical perspective, one could argue that Rogers could be trying to motivate Christians to support his media forays into the child developmental psychology of the period that appear geared more toward liberal secularized ethics than conventional religion. Finally, his explicit project is to set a countervailing force against the charming cynicism, the sadistic puns, and the inversions and asides that he feels do not mitigate anxiety and confusion, but actually foster it with distrust.

The language choices made here are notable in several ways. For one, as I mentioned above, they are devoid of explicit religious language of piety that one might expect given the fact that he is addressing a church audience. That choice could reflect the growing exclusion of religion from the public square and the postwar emphasis on pluralism. It could also likely be that Rogers continues the approach of the social gospel tradition, which was not pietistic. In a 1975 transcription of a *Protestant Radio Hour* featuring Rogers, Rogers ties his messages of love, forgiveness, acceptance, neighborliness, and care directly to the Gospel. “It seems to me that one of our most

important tasks as parents and Christian educators is to help and encourage both children and their adults to discover their own unique ways of expressing love,” he begins. Later in the document he discusses how Jesus inspires acceptance and emphasizes the importance of loving a person for who they are “on the inside.”

Christianity to me is a matter of being accepted as we are. Jesus certainly wasn’t concerned about people’s stations in life or what they looked like or whether they were perfect in behavior or feeling....Children often show me the clothes they’re wearing and tell me that their pants or their dresses are new. After I tell them that I like their clothes I often add, ‘But you know the part of you that I like best; it’s the person inside!’<sup>160</sup>

Here, he ties his core beliefs to the teachings of Christ and notes the ways that he tried to model Christ in his behaviors and attitudes. Notably, Rogers’ explicit mention of Christ and the Gospels here takes place on a religious radio program, supporting my hypothesis that Rogers excluded religious language in secular spaces in order to reach a broader audience.

Second, Rogers’ rhetoric regarding care, affect, and its connection to “health” is deeply engaged with the contemporary theories of child-rearing and child development stemming from the work of Erik Erikson and popularized by Dr. Benjamin Spock. Therefore, the language of health will replace the language of grace and salvation.<sup>161</sup> Thus, he advocates for his readers to come together to produce “healthy” programming choices for children, in contrast with the commercial stations’ “trash.” “Healthy,” of course, is a term that comes from the medical sphere of science that was adopted by psychology, in its effort to represent itself as a science. Such a rhetorical move is

---

<sup>160</sup> Rogers, “Protestant Hour.”

<sup>161</sup> Notably, rhetorical moves like this one are historically rooted in the social gospel tradition as it played into social hygiene movements of the Progressive Era. But the turn begins even earlier with Theodore Parker, who was probably the first minister to draw extensively upon social science in his sermons advocating social reforms like abolition.

indicative of (1) the ways Rogers sees his project as allied with the interests of the church and its behavioral and cultural curricula, (2) a perceived need on the part of Rogers to speak the values of Christian ethics through secular language, and (3) Rogers' attempt to integrate Christian ethics with child development understanding of the time.<sup>162</sup>

Finally, Rogers addresses the question of funding and the church's either inadequate resources or insufficient commitment. Thus far, his program has had to rely on the budget of educational television or the support of a local department store to underwrite his program: "The Church has always had to retreat to radio jingles and spot quilt makers." This funding situation cannot be the basis on which to launch a project that calls for a "long-range excellence in children's television." Rather, such a ministry would be fulfilled only if secure funding for long-range television production were made possible. This is Rogers' challenge to the church should it want to have agency and influence in this cultural moment. Only then, he implies, would there be a choice in the television market for viewers. With passion, he tells the church that this is practically its last chance to assert both paramount values to their tradition – individual freedom (here in relation to consumer choice) and social influence.

The time of speaking to our children in an entertaining yet SANE way through television has never been more appropriate. It is not fair for parents (and children) not to have a choice. It is evident that the commercial telecaster will not give this choice. The Church can offer that choice by recognizing what we already know: that television is the major source of broad communication in our world today. Let's find the money to produce, and promote long-range excellence in children's television. What a magnificent ministry it really can be!<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Note that this document was most likely created during the mid-1960s, when Rogers was working on the Canadian program *Misterogers*, and thus cannot be read as a retroactive attempt to scrounge up material support for what some will read as a kind of moral crusade project.

<sup>163</sup> This final line is a good rhetorical example of peroration seen in many missionary speeches.

As an alternative to writing letters to broadcasters in order to censor displeasing television content, Rogers suggests creative action by offering his work as a model of success in this new cultural setting. In order to influence the behavioral and cultural instruction of the young to ensure the maintenance of once-dominant Protestant values, Rogers proposes an alliance between individual agents such as himself and the church. He sees in the church, an old and successful institution that can swerve into a new field of cultural and political action and construction of consciousness. From this perspective, we can view Rogers as part of a tradition of more liberal mainline Protestants working within media to promote the maintenance of traditional cultural and ethical values in American society.<sup>164</sup>

In addressing the church, Rogers also conveys the thesis that since children are spending more time in front of degenerate television programming than at school, television content has become a terrain that the church must contest in order to reassert “enriching” lessons and “proper” values. Rogers clearly sees television as a pedagogical device. Since, as he asserts, television delivers messages that are “the opposite”<sup>165</sup> of the values and instruction of those communicated at school and church, it poses a threat not just to the church but to the fundamental structures and functioning of American society. Thus, the urgency of the day is to find a way of competing with the device’s overwhelming pedagogical nature and influence. In “Children’s TV: What The Church Can Do About It,” Rogers seeks to empower his Christian peers to assert themselves

---

<sup>164</sup> For another perspective on these developments as related to the feminization of culture through the avenues of the literary and the religious, see Ann Douglass, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

<sup>165</sup> While this contrast may seem to some as exaggerated, Rogers was emphatic in his opinion that television content celebrated behaviors and values that were in stark contrast with those espoused in pedagogical institutions of learning such as the school and the church.

more directly into the production of television. He hopes that taking this action will lead to the development of choices in television programming that reflect his values, which he feels are not currently represented on the small screen.

If we accept Neil Postman's argument that modern print culture created a kind of knowledge divide between two age categories of people – the young child and the adult – we can understand better just how threatening the television was to the conventional wisdom, social structure, and dominant power hierarchies of modern American life that sought to “protect” children from learning about adult “secrets” at an early age. This line of thinking goes as follow: If children were supposed to be gradually exposed to knowledge through the controlled networks of school, family, and church, then mass media, and especially television disrupts this highly structured knowledge dissemination process allowing children to access a variety of information without literary skills inside the refuge of their own home. According to Giroux, who highlights Postman's thesis, “the loss of childhood innocence in this scenario registers the passing of a historical and political juncture in which children could be contained and socialized under the watchful tutelage of dominant regulatory institutions such as the family, school, and church.”<sup>166</sup> Giroux's concerns regarding the colonization of children's media texts by corporations like Disney in the age of neoliberalism are not far from those of Rogers' in the ways that Giroux expresses alarm over the lack of diverse perspectives and ideas in electronic media.<sup>167</sup> Giroux's ties his critique directly toward a steadfast and unfailing interest in the preservation of American democracy, which requires civic literacy. “As commercial

---

<sup>166</sup> The Giroux Reader, chapter 5: “Child Beauty Pageants and the Politics of Innocence,” 127.

<sup>167</sup> See Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010).

culture replaces public culture and the language of the market becomes a substitute for the language of democracy,” Giroux writes, “consumerism appears to be the only kind of citizenship on offer to children and adults alike.”<sup>168</sup> Let us now turn to a discussion of the ways that television altered and restructured the stages in which children were exposed to adult knowledges by a blurring of institutional and spatial boundaries.

### **Blurring Boundaries:**

#### **TV, Pedagogy, Child Development, and the Family**

The collaboration between Rogers and University of Pittsburgh child development psychologist Dr. Margaret McFarland shows that Rogers developed a deep understanding of how adults could communicate with children by taking into account not only the capacity of the new medium for the production of communication with the wider public, but also the new understanding of the child’s consciousness as an amalgam of cognitive and affective development, which involves specific stages. Drawing from the work of child psychologist, Erik Erikson, whose work observing and working with children produced breakthrough understandings of the development of the human personality,<sup>169</sup> McFarland and Rogers attempted to translate their knowledge about

---

<sup>168</sup> Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared*, 24.

<sup>169</sup> Writing in 1950, Erik Erikson details new conclusions in psychology regarding the ways that persons develop neurosis. Whereas previously, “psychopathology” professionals pondered whether neurosis resided in the individual or in his society, new research has produced a nuanced consensus that holds that “a neurosis is psycho- and somatic, psycho- and social, and interpersonal” (Erikson, *Childhood and Society* [New York: W. W. Norton], 23). Such a conclusion shifts attention away from the individual himself and emphasizes instead his psychological development within the larger social system – the most importance and influential of which is the family unit. From this foundational framework, Erikson asserts that efforts must be made to engage in therapeutic investigations that seek to understand an individual in the context of his familial culture. “For a psychosomatic crisis,” he writes, “is an emotional crisis to the extent to which the sick individual is responding specifically to the latent crises in the significant people around him” (33). Further, in detailing a specific case study centered on a young boy named Sam, Erikson reveals how he comes to understand to core of Sam’s emotional crisis only through gaining further knowledge about the dynamics between Sam, his mother, and his father. Then, Erikson shows that by helping Sam to articulate

healthy child development through the new medium of television. McFarland's work in early child development stressed the importance of the family as "the primary educational institution,"<sup>170</sup> a position that conferred upon the television a new and powerful place in the family dynamic. As we will see, this perspective arguably served as the foundational footing for *MRN*. In fact, Rogers named his media company "Family Communications" in 1971. In planning the structured contents of each *MRN* program, Rogers worked closely with McFarland, his primary consultant and mentor. The two worked to construct scenarios, stories, and messages keenly tailored to the educational and psychological needs of children as understood by Arsenal Family Children's Center<sup>171</sup> founders, pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, Erik Erikson, and McFarland herself.<sup>172</sup>

---

the complexity of his feelings toward his mother that developed after the event of his grandmother's death, significant progress is made in reducing the boy's neurotic and destructive behavior. "Thus," he writes, "the boy learned to share his self-observation with the very mother against whom his rages were apt to be directed, and to make her an ally of his insight" (32). According to Erikson, this was of "utmost importance" because it made it possible for the boy to warn his mother and himself when he felt the impending anxiety, which usually took the form of wrathful behavior and/or somatic epileptic attacks. As a result, the mother was able to immediately consult the pediatrician, who would advise a preventative measure. Erikson thus concludes, "major attacks did not recur" (32). Erikson's case study of "Sam" illustrates his landmark research findings about child development and the family dynamic. It also details Erikson's groundbreaking therapeutic approach that stresses a process of (1) observing the child in his family environment to gain greater understanding of the child's internal conflict, (2) engaging in interpersonal talk therapy with the child to assist him in articulating his feelings, (3) dialoging with all family players about the new breakthroughs in understanding the child's perspective, and (4) figuring out ways, collectively, to manage and resolve the problematic dynamic. Here, understanding arises from attentive observation, dialoging to discover a problem's roots, and mindful, interactive behavioral change. It is clear from my examination of writings, television episodes, and other articulations, that the discoveries of Erikson were adopted and employed by McFarland and Rogers on *MRN*. Fred Rogers noted in his 1969 Senate testimony that "feelings are mentionable and manageable" ("Senate Statement on PBS Funding," 1 May, 1969, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fredrogerssenatetestimonypbs.htm>). This phrase seems to encapsulate a large breakthrough Erikson made in his child development research.

<sup>170</sup> McFarland grant letter.

<sup>171</sup> "Arsenal Family and Children's Center was founded in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh in 1953 by pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock. Then on the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Dr. Spock designed the Center as a training site for pediatric students to study normal child development in the context of a neighborhood that was highly ethnic (Eastern European) and stable. Dr. Spock believed this would secure longitudinal study of child growth and development across generations" (Arsenal Family and Children's Center, "History," accessed 26 June, 2013, <http://www.arsenalfamily.com/history.asp>).

<sup>172</sup> Rogers was instructed by his Pittsburgh Theological Seminary professors, during his final semesters at the Seminary to do research in the field of child development at the Arsenal Family and Children's Center (Hedda Sharapan, interview with the author, 19 June, 2013, Pittsburgh, PA).

Television changed the definition and understanding of home entertainment by bringing the oral culture and dramas portrayed on screens once exclusive to the cinema house into domestic life.<sup>173</sup> With the introduction of television, we see a blending and overlapping of the times and spaces of entertainment and those of family life as television erased the boundaries between both private and public time/space, and entertainment and family life. With the installation of television into domestic space, “the primary site of exhibition for spectator amusements was transferred from the public space of the movie theater to the private space of the home.”<sup>174</sup>

Here, it is also useful to note Edward T. Hall’s identification of spatial zones in relation to the ways that physical environment, space, and territory become forms of nonverbal communication.<sup>175</sup> Hall identified four spatial zones – *intimate space*, the most personal communication wherein people are 0 to 1.5 feet apart; *personal space*, where most conversation between family and friends occur and in which people are 1.5 to 4 feet apart; *social space*, where the majority of group interactions take place wherein people are 4 to 12 feet; and *public space*, where, for example, a speaker is at least 12 feet away from his audience. From this perspective, the television set, which broadcasts moving images of human interaction and speech, potentially exists and operates respectively within both personal and social space. Further, as an object that belongs within the category of home furniture, it is imbued with symbolic meaning tied to the social space of

---

<sup>173</sup> See Spigel, *Make Room for Television*, 99-135. See also Meyrowitz. While it is true that entertainment was a prominent feature in the American home prior to this point in the form of print materials, pianos and other musical instruments, and family sing-alongs, the type of fully embodied communication that constitutes cinema and television had not been introduced to the domestic environment until this point.

<sup>174</sup> Spigel, *Make Room for Television*, 1.

<sup>175</sup> See Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).



kinship and domesticity.<sup>176</sup> As we will see in my discussion below, Rogers is keenly aware of the symbolic space that television, as a system of communication, has come to play in the midst of the family, where before outsiders were not embodied participants.

It is also helpful here, in regards to understanding these spatial dimensions between the viewer and the television's representation of social life and sociability, to keep in mind the thesis regarding the development of a new space of communication called the parasocial asserted by Horton and Wohl.<sup>177</sup> They argue that the characteristics of new media create the illusion of a personal relationship for the viewer between himself and the performer. Similar to Ong's identification of the connection between orality and community formation,<sup>178</sup> Horton and Wohl add that images presented on television create specific socio-biological responses in viewers. "In television, especially," they argue, "the image which is presented makes available nuances of appearance and gesture to which ordinary social perception is attentive and to which interaction is cued."<sup>179</sup> Especially when an actor is playing himself, as Rogers does in *MRN*, audience members respond "with something more than running observation."<sup>180</sup> That "something" is active participation. This "simulacrum of conversational give and take," the authors write, "may be called parasocial interaction."<sup>181</sup> Though the authors only refer to the family once in

---

<sup>176</sup> While one could argue that radios are also imbued with this symbolic meaning, I would argue, citing the work of Ong and Meyrowitz, that the fully embodied communication nature of television penetrates the viewer's perception at a different level of intimacy.

<sup>177</sup> See Horton and Wohl.

<sup>178</sup> In chapter three of *Orality and Literacy*, Ong discusses the connections between orality, community, and the sacred. "Because in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word precedes from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups. The interiorizing force of the oral word relates in a special way to the sacred, to the ultimate concerns of existence." He adds that "the spoken word forms unities on a large scale" (Ong, 74).

<sup>179</sup> Horton and Wohl, 215.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

their article, I would argue that given this unanticipated dimension of the capacity of the television set to communicate within the family milieu, a revolution has taken place in the socio-affective space of the family. And this transformation is acknowledged and capitalized on with the creation of the character of “Mister Rogers.” In retrospect, it would seem that *MRN* is predicated on this phenomenon of the parasocial.

Rogers’ collaboration with McFarland appears within an ongoing socio-cultural discussion concerning the mother as the chief educator in the family. McFarland, Spock and Erikson emerged out of a historical context in which knowledge about child-rearing had been usurped from mothers during the 1910s and 20s by medical and psychology professionals whose authority was disseminated prominently through mass market women’s magazines.<sup>182</sup> It was during this period that the specific knowledge of women and mothers, celebrated and deployed by modern women’s empowerment groups such as the Mother’s Movement,<sup>183</sup> were reappropriated by such “experts” in child-raising and

---

<sup>182</sup> This is not to say that there was no discussion on child rearing prior to this moment. Indeed, Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) places child-rearing advice manuals in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Although a more extensive treatment of the bibliography on maternalist politics would include the works of Timothy Aubry and Trysh Tavis, *Rethinking Therapeutic Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); and Lynn Weiner, “Maternalism as a Paradigm,” *Journal of Women’s History* 5.2 (1993), 96-98 amongst others, for the purposes of indicating the cultural lineage of Rogers’ interest in child rearing it is not necessary here to offer a more detailed discussion of this history.

<sup>183</sup> The Mother’s Movement took organization form in 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers. The group was founded as a traditional, “maternalist” organization that required its participants to embrace mother’s rights to influence public policy but disavow women’s rights that led to sex equality. The Congress was led by elite, white women and had a top-down model of organization with a base in Washington, D.C. The Congress’ discourse celebrated the virtues of motherhood on a universal level but viewed Anglo-American motherhood as the ideal and promoted the idea that others needed to assimilate to their conceptions of “American” family norms. After being listed as one of the “socialist-pacifist” women’s groups in the early 1920s, the group shifted from educating mothers to offering knowledge and support to “parents” and professionals. In 1924, it was renamed the National Conference of Parents and Teachers. See entry, Maureen Fitzgerald, “National Congress of Mothers,” in *The Reader’s Companion to U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Wilma Mankiller, et al. (New York: Mariner Books, 1999). See also Ehrenreich and English, 210-15.

child development.<sup>184</sup> It is in this context that the reading of magazine articles by such scientific “experts” became a nationwide practice amongst women.<sup>185</sup> As noted by Ellen Seiter, the new child psychology was a “child-centered model,”<sup>186</sup> which called for mothers not only to care for her child’s body and health but for the mind, “and its rate of development.” As a result of these additional pressures, along with the increasing stress on the importance of early life and its connection to raising a well-adjusted child, mothers found themselves in a role with more pressures and yet lacking in the specialized knowledge needed to succeed in their changing role.

Within this sphere of heightened anxiety regarding child-raising, Dr. Benjamin Spock stepped in to quell some of the collective parental distress by reassuring mothers (and fathers) that their natural instincts were more than likely correct and thus empowering them to redevelop confidence in their abilities. With this new outlook and in others way that broke from early century psychological consensus on parenting, Dr. Spock’s intervention into the sphere of child-raising advice with the publication of his 1946 book *Common Sense Book of Baby and Childcare* marked a deep break with the predominant thinking in the field of child-raising during the pre-WWII period. In contrast to expert John B. Watson’s theories on child-rearing, which emphasized the treatment of infants and toddlers as small adults who should never be kissed or hugged,<sup>187</sup> Spock

---

<sup>184</sup> “By the 1920s . . . child rearing was no longer seen as a natural instinct of the mother; rather, it was a professional skill that women had to learn by heading the wisdom of (mostly male) professionals” (Spigel, “Seducing the Innocent,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, 113).

<sup>185</sup> Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 229.

<sup>186</sup> See Ellen Seiter, “Children’s Desires/Mother’s Dilemmas,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, 297-317.

<sup>187</sup> John B. Watson famously wrote: “Never hug and kiss [your children]. Never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say goodnight. Shake hands with them in the morning. Give them a pat on the head if they have made an extraordinary good job of a difficult task” (Watson, “Against the Threat of Mother Love,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, 474).

argued that children needed “love, not coercion.”<sup>188</sup> In *Common Sense*, he encouraged parents to trust their instincts and preached that traditional disciplining methods, which he equated to punishment, were far less effective than the modeling of good behavior by parents in raising well-adjusted, emotionally and socially healthy adults.<sup>189</sup>

Spock’s approach to child-raising integrated psychology, educational theory, and pediatrics; he was especially influenced by Freud and shared Freud’s assumption that the early years of life ostensibly determined the personality of the adult.<sup>190</sup> He also was inspired by John Dewey’s democratic educational approach. Through this integration of psychology, education, and medicine, combined with his personal and practical experience, Spock advised mothers and fathers how to prevent their children from developing antisocial and emotionally impaired habits of being. His key pedagogical points instructed parents to respond to their child’s needs, to foster a close, secure attachment with the child, and to give and model love within the entire family.<sup>191</sup>

As a pediatrician, Spock was beloved by mothers and children alike.<sup>192</sup> Part of his charm had to do with his other-oriented dynamic that stressed mutuality and respect. A *New York Times* 1998 obituary of Spock states that part of his success was due to his concern for the feelings of his patients and their parents, noting that he wore business

---

<sup>188</sup> Rich Caulfield, “‘Trust Yourself’: Revisiting Benjamin Spock,” in *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 26.4 (1999), 264. Note that the grandfather of Spock’s wife, Horace Bushnell, made similar prescriptions a century earlier in *Christian Nurture* (1861). Spock was an avowed atheist.

<sup>189</sup> Caulfield, 264.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>191</sup> In 1972, Spock noted that, “John Dewey and Freud said that kids don’t have to be disciplined into adulthood but can direct themselves toward adulthood by following their own will” (quoted in Eric Pace, “Benjamin Spock, World’s Pediatrician Dies at 94,” *New York Times*, 17 March, 1998).

<sup>192</sup> “Nothing less than the fate of America’s children seemed to rest in Dr. Spock’s hands, or so it appeared from the hundreds of parents asking advice, reporters and television commentators seeking words of wisdom, and even politicians, who implied that the nation, by some silent and unanimous plebiscite, had given him this awesome responsibility” (Thomas Maier, *Dr. Spock: An American Life* [New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998], 214).

suits to work instead of the traditional white coat in order to make his visitors feel more relaxed.<sup>193</sup> Spock's focus on mutuality, concern with the feelings of others, and practice of making others feel comfortable in his presence harkens to the style and approach of Rogers who emphasizes his show's offering of ritual expressions of care for his television viewers.

By 1952, *Common Sense* had sold more than four million copies, demonstrating the enthusiastic reception of by a public that could not have enough advice texts.<sup>194</sup> Like his predecessors in the area of child-rearing advice giving, he published widely in women's magazines such as *Redbook* and *Ladies Home Journal* offering his democratic, "common sense" style of parenting. Ironically, one could argue that the magazines and books proffering advice on child-rearing acted as a precursor to the televisual presence within the family of a credible male stranger, who communicates with mothers in a helpful, authoritative way. In contrast to the presentation of textual advice, the television, which does not require the skill of reading, allows such authorities to, in a double irony, speak directly to the child, bypassing both mother and father as the primary educators. Prior to Spock, the primary assumption that undergirded such practices was that both the child and the mother were passive receptors, that the expert knew best, and that therefore it was the responsibility of the lay adults, as led by the "experts," to generate moral values in the young by guarding the gates to knowledge."<sup>195</sup> Although Spock still assumed a position of "expert," his primary message to readers placed agency and confidence in parents by encouraging them, in overarching fashion, to trust their own lay

---

<sup>193</sup> Maier, 214.

<sup>194</sup> Spiegel, "Seducing the Innocent," 115.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

knowledge and biological instincts. Spock's discursive intervention marked a sharp turn within expert consensus, and, with the success of his book, within the society at large in regards to child-rearing approaches and practices. It is within this radical new vein of discourses on knowledge and cultural power that McFarland's perspective on television as an educational instrument and Rogers' project as a whole must be examined in order to understand more fully the cultural import of their intervention.<sup>196</sup>

In television, McFarland and Rogers, who continue a legacy of the central canon of Progressivism, saw an opportunity to bring a structure of value and dissemination of knowledge to child-oriented programming that had been thrown into chaos by the commercial television that Rogers decries in "Children's TV: What the Church Can Do About It." It is not that Rogers and McFarland are looking for any kind of regulation tantamount to censorship emanating from any private institution or the government. Rather, they are looking to bring into consideration the fact that these programs are viewed by children of a tender age whose innocence needs to be highly profiled. Thus, they feel compelled to impart their particular understandings from the field of child development (for both McFarland and Rogers) and Christian ethics (for Rogers) onto a

---

<sup>196</sup> It is also important to note that over time, Spock acquired many critics who spoke out against what they identified as his "permissive" child-rearing style. In the 1960s, Spock began protesting the Vietnam War and the development of nuclear arms often times in solidarity with members of the generation of babies he had helped raise. In the early 70s he became a presidential candidate of the far-left People's Party and ran on a platform of free medical care, the legalization of abortion and marijuana, a guaranteed minimum wage, and the withdrawal of American troops from all foreign nations. The Rev. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale noted the ways Spock's politics aligned with the platforms of radical youth movements of the time, stating that the doctor had entered into the streets "with these babies raised according to his books, demonstrating with them for things they claim we should not deny them." Peele reduced Spock's child care messages to the phrase, "Feed 'em whenever they want, never let them cry, satisfy their every desire." Spock refuted these kinds of critiques stating that he did not wish to "encourage permissiveness" but rather to "relax rigidity" (quoted in Pace). Similar critiques have also been mounted against the messaging of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. After his death in 1993, Rogers took a brunt of criticism from anchors at Fox News who pointed to his pedagogy as the "root cause" of youth entitlement among the millennial generation. See Prachi Gupta, "The 10 worst Fox News interviews of the decade," in Salon Magazine, 20 July, 2013, [http://www.salon.com/2013/07/30/10\\_worst\\_fox\\_news\\_interviews\\_of\\_the\\_decade/](http://www.salon.com/2013/07/30/10_worst_fox_news_interviews_of_the_decade/).

wide segment of children and adults through mass communication. The fact that they viewed this opportunity as a pedagogical move in the interest of healthy child development and the greater good of society does not negate the power/knowledge matrix in which even Progressive endeavors are caught.

Mass media were often viewed as potentially dangerous for youth in the ways that they opened up possibilities for them to be exposed to “adult secrets,” to use Neil Postman’s term that had been censored prior to the creation of widely available mass media products. To counter this, experts and others sought to transfer “good” knowledge, values, and ethics through the medium. Such missions were aimed to ensure public exposure to healthy and normal behaviors and values. Therefore, the phenomenon of the normalization of childhood experience<sup>197</sup> became intensified due to the weight that the opinion and advice of experts carried in the cultural institutions in charge of raising children. This normalization included the monitoring of children’s entertainment, which opened the space of childhood learning onto the industry of mass entertainment. Within this space, Rogers makes a cultural intervention as a result of his recognition that entertainment is, in fact, a pedagogy. It is in this conflated space of entertainment and

---

<sup>197</sup> Here, I am referring here to a set of beneficial aspirations for the kinds of shared experiences that American children as a whole should enjoy (e.g. food security; protection from physical or psychological abuse; schooling for all; protection from child labor practices; general health; a nurturing family and community environment, etc.). Many of these aspirations were Progressive initiatives. “There is a ‘conventional wisdom,’ to borrow from John Kenneth Galbraith, in education as well as in economics, and by the end of World War II progressivism had come to be that conventional wisdom. Discussions of educational policy were liberally spiced with phrases like ‘recognizing individual differences,’ ‘personality development,’ ‘the whole child,’ ‘social and emotional growth,’ ‘creative self-expression,’ ‘the needs of learners,’ ‘intrinsic motivation,’ ‘persistent life situations,’ ‘bridging the gap between home and school,’ ‘teaching children, not subjects,’ ‘teacher-pupil relationships,’ and ‘staff planning.’ Such phrases were a cant, to be sure, the peculiar jargon of the pedagogues. But they were more than that, for they signified that Dewey’s forecast of a day when *progressive* education would eventually be accepted as *good* education had now finally come to pass” (Lawrence A. Cremin, “The Crisis in Popular Education,” in *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1976-1957* [New York: Knopf, 1961], 328).

pedagogy where he enters with a radically new understanding of child subjectivity as a developmental process that engages both cognitive and affective dynamics. In fashioning his programming and studying children at the Arsenal Center, Rogers brings together his discovery of the parasocial effects of television with his understanding that in entertainment there is a pedagogy.

In her letter, “To Whom it May Concern,” McFarland notes that contemporary wisdom on early childhood education neglects the importance of the family as an “educational unit,” promoting instead the assembling of young children for exclusive instruction by “teachers or child care workers.”<sup>198</sup>

There is much to be said for preschool education when the teachers are well qualified and basically concerned for the development of the children but such groups are a family supplement and not a family substitute....It is possible that society would be able to obtain a richer return on the public investment in the development of children if a greater portion of the available resources were applied to enhancing the family as an educational group.<sup>199</sup>

From this position, McFarland moves to discuss the new phenomena of television and its location within the center of family life. She identifies the rise of television communications in the 1960s, noting that the device has become “an integral aspect of family experience.”<sup>200</sup> Further, she decries the fact that no national plan exists for enriching the education of those considered “deprived of stimulation and meaningful exposure to cultural influences” through the employment of the new technology.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> Fred Rogers Center archivist Emily Uhrin posits the mid-late 1960s as a rough estimate date for McFarland’s letter. The letter reads like a grant proposal.

<sup>199</sup> Margaret McFarland, “To Whom It May Concern.”

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. In 1946, the FCC published a Blue Book that detailed the failure of private broadcasting to achieve its earlier agreed upon public-service obligations. While the Blue Book did not end up influencing policy of the time, but in 1948, just two years after the first television stations went on the air, the large demand for television frequencies lead the FCC to institute a moratorium on any further issuances of licenses. This “time out” period lasted from 1948 to 1952 and was known as the “FCC freeze” (James Day, *The*



McFarland writes during a time in which groups within the adult culture are voicing sharp alarms regarding the vulnerability of youth to anti-social and destructive behaviors and messages textualized and discursively embedded in mass media products. The potential for exposure to such messages during this time of electronic media development and marketing threatened a post-Enlightenment Western society within which adults had ritualized and institutionalized the filtering of knowledge to the young.<sup>202</sup> Postman argues that “Lock’s tabula rasa created a sense of guilt in parents about their children’s development, and provided the psychological and epistemological grounds for making the careful nurturing of children a national priority, at least among the merchant classes.”<sup>203</sup> Prior to the emergence of mass communication, the church and school struggled to bring about a social situation in which what obtained was a gradual revealing of adult knowledges or “secrets” to the young in “proper” intervals according to

---

*Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996], 17). The time was to be used for finding a viable way to locate additional channels to meet the demand of commercial interests but a group of educational activists “seized on the ‘freeze’ to push its own agenda” (Day, 17). They were concerned that the new powerful domestic visual medium, with its “unexplored potential for teaching,” would be handed over entirely to the interests of commerce. “The educators wanted some part of the new medium dedicated to a purpose loftier than light entertainment and more enlightening than ads for painkillers and detergent” (Day, 17). A battle ensued around 1951 to reserve channels for educational purposes. This battle reached a climax in 1952 when the FCC issued *Sixth Report and Order*, which assigned inferior bands (UHF) to this kind of programming. “Responsibility for failing to articulate a clearer sense of mission for the new medium can easily be laid at the feet of the federal bureaucracy” (Day, 28). However, by the end of 1953 the central pieces of educational television in the U.S. were in place largely due to the efforts and deep financial support of the Ford Foundation. It is important to note that this system amounted to a federation of independent stations which would therefore broadcast to its local communities rather than to the nation as a whole like the BBC in England or the major American broadcasting corporations. The reader should keep in mind that *MRN* began as a project of the local Pittsburgh educational television station, WQED, the nation’s fourth local educational station. “With its industrial money from steel, banking, and manufacturing and its strong citizen leadership, the Golden Triangle was well suited to the creation of this new breed of community-based station. Pittsburgh’s mayor David Lawrence, brought the money and leadership together under the insistent and tenacious prodding of his longtime friend, FCC commissioner Frieda Hennock” (Day, 38).

<sup>202</sup> See Postman, 53-64.

<sup>203</sup> Postman, 57.

age.<sup>204</sup> This kind of pedagogical wisdom and control, however, was clearly being usurped and disturbed by the power of mass communication technologies.

After the Second World War, the “legacy of child saving,” which began with the first mass media threat to childhood innocence in the form of dime novels and other cheap print media during the mid-nineteenth century, and adult concern regarding the influence of mass media “was taken to its logical extreme when local, state, and federal governments focused with unparalleled concern on the figure of the ‘juvenile delinquent.’”<sup>205</sup> Soon after the end of World War II, the federal government established the Continuing Committee on the Prevention and Control of Delinquency. In the popular discourse, child psychologists featured in women’s magazines advised mothers on prevention strategies to combat potential anti-social and/or emotionally-impaired development. It is critical to note that during this period, the conventional wisdom held that juvenile delinquency had two main causes – a poor family life (i.e. the social and psychological quality of family life) and mass media.<sup>206</sup> It is within this politicized culture in which professional “experts”<sup>207</sup> had become authoritative voices in discursively delimiting parental practices through persuasion that McFarland and Rogers emerge to formulate *MRN*.

In tandem with Rogers’ critique, McFarland notes that this new exposure of children to “dramatized situations” on television has the potential to confuse the child’s sense of reality and thus can have a negative influence on her development. As a

---

<sup>204</sup> Postman calls this a “sequence of revealed secrets” (quoted in Steyer, 15)

<sup>205</sup> Spiegel, “Seducing the Innocent,” 114. See also James B. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford, 1986).

<sup>206</sup> Spiegel, “Seducing the Innocent,” 114.

<sup>207</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1922), 80.

corrective, she urges the development of child-friendly and educative programming, emphasizing the new technology's capacity to extend "the educational experience of all children regardless of the economic circumstances of their parents, the socio-cultural identity of their families, the type of community in which they live or other factors by which we define segregation."<sup>208</sup> McFarland's ideas regarding the potential of television to reach and educate the lower classes was a concept held by many Progressive educators, such as *Sesame Street* creator Joan Ganz Cooney, also an early children's programmer for National Educational Television (NET, which later became PBS).<sup>209</sup> Compulsory literacy had already shown that school attendance diminished regional, class, ethnic, and racial differences and disseminated an American norm based largely on white, middle-class values and aspirations. Like *Sesame Street*, Rogers and his collaborators made an effort over the years to include racial diversity on *MRN*.<sup>210</sup> Still, *MRN*, no doubt projected a norm rooted in "white, middle-class values and life experiences," as was the cultural leadership norm during the time. Contrary to today's assumptions on the dynamic of inclusive/exclusive attached to cultural products of the 1950s and 60s, evidence shows that the very first season of *MRN* (130 episodes) features several African-American actors who play the roles of important and respected neighbors and invited artists.

---

<sup>208</sup> McFarland, "To Whom it May Concern."

<sup>209</sup> See Robert W. Morrow, *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

<sup>210</sup> While *MRN* and *Sesame Street* were produced during the same time period and aired on educational/public television, as children's television shows, they had different missions and were directed toward different audiences. *Sesame Street* aimed to help minority children living in urban settings gain a "head start" on school learning before they entered preschool and kindergarten. Its setting and characters reflected that of a diverse, urban neighborhood city block. Rogers program did not specifically target such a minority audience, although his program incorporated racially diverse characters during the 1970s and 80s as multi-cultural, progressive values became more prominent within the culture at large.

McFarland's argument is interesting politically as it appears to integrate the structural perspective that supports the promotion of state-funded education models as a solution to social and economic inequality with more culturally focused arguments that place primary responsibility on the family institution in regards to socio-economic uplift and success. In essence, McFarland posits that the television device creates a unique communication environment for learning to occur in which educators can ostensibly insert themselves into the communication culture of any given family. If the family, as McFarland argues, is the most important educational institution that exists in human culture, the television allows for external agents and experts in the area of child development and education like she and Rogers, to enter into family discourse with their educative curricula with the hope of conveying "better" values and practices. Such intimate communication not only with children, but with the intergenerational family unit,<sup>211</sup> appeared to hold great promise for educating the underprivileged inside of McFarland's coveted family dynamic setting.

McFarland's appeal is consistent with the concerns and ideals of what historian David Farber has called "the age of great dreams." One of the noblest of these dreams, writes Robert W. Morrow, author of *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television* (2006), "was the creation of a society free of racism, free of poverty."<sup>212</sup> It is within the same vein of government-funded education programs such as Head Start<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>211</sup> It is important to note that the decline of intergenerational living and the rise of the nuclear family during the postwar period contributed to the success of the reliance on "experts" in childcare as the older generation no longer was around (i.e. living in the family house) to pass on wisdom and advice to young parents.

<sup>212</sup> Farber, 4.

<sup>213</sup> The Head Start program began in 1965 under President Lyndon Johnson as part of his War on Poverty initiative. Still in existence today, it is a comprehensive child development program intended to meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool-aged children. The program was developed under the leadership of Dr. Robert Cooke, a pediatrician at the Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Edward Zigler, a professor of

and television programs such as *Sesame Street*, inspired partly by new insights and understandings of child development articulated by McFarland and others that *MRN* emerged. It is important to note, however, just as these aims seek to ameliorate socio-economic, race, and class inequalities, they also, because of the power/knowledge complex within which they are situated, have the effect of asserting the values of the dominant socio-economic class/race as a “best practices” norm.

Returning to McFarland’s letter, she next points to *MRN*, a relatively new program at the time, as an example of how television can be used as a pedagogical tool for fostering healthy child development. She notes that the *Neighborhood* is directed toward children in their pre-school and “early school years” and draws an explicit connection to the then-novel Head Start program, which targets children of the same age. After establishing the intended educational value of *MRN* by comparing it to Head Start, McFarland proceeds to describe the unique personality and talents of Fred Rogers.

Highlighting Rogers’ pedagogical and professional credibility, McFarland writes, “Mr. Fred Rogers, the creator of this program, is not only a talented creative artist, he is a well qualified child-development specialist.” She then moves to deepen and add further dynamism to the reader’s impression of Rogers by noting that he “has a unique capacity for interpersonal relationships with children” and is “deeply empathic with their needs and feelings, and their perceptions of the world around them.” Here, we can see the influence of Spock, who asserted that a baby who is lovingly cared for, appreciated, and

---

psychology and the director of the Child Study Center at Yale University. The research employed for the program indicated an obligation to help underprivileged groups compensate for poor social and economic conditions. According to the program’s website, “Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs.” (See History of Head Start, Head Start Program website, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>.)

encouraged to explore the world, will grow to become a confident and well-adjusted adult.<sup>214</sup>McFarland provides testimony of Rogers' talents and expertise as well as an account of child viewers of *MRN*.<sup>215</sup> She notes the dynamic and broad cultural knowledge held by Rogers, praising him as the primary source for *MRN* programs. She stresses his "basic concern for the welfare of children and the clarity of his professional identity as an adult responsible for making a positive contribution to the development of children." Finally, she describes in detail her experience observing "Mr. Rogers'" interactions with children and stresses how unusual the children's response to *MRN* conversations she has had with parents that reveal the efficacy of Rogers' televisual approach.

Children seem to regard Mr. Rogers on the television screen as a trusted person, related to them in an interpersonal way. Their responses to this program are different than to the usual television entertainment for children. Children tend to talk to Mr. Rogers during the program, their faces are mobile reflecting varied feelings, they are prone to get up and respond actively to suggestions.<sup>216</sup>

Further, she writes, when Rogers says goodbye at the end of the program, child viewers react "as though they had been separated from a meaningful adult."<sup>217</sup> It would seem that Rogers, in his direct interaction with children at the Arsenal had discovered the power of face-to-face dialogical communication. It is this communication dynamic that he sought to transfer to the interaction between the television persona of "Mister Rogers" and his child viewers. This act of mutual recognition calls to mind education theorist, Paolo Freire's approach<sup>218</sup> to the relationship of teacher and student in which he calls educators

---

<sup>214</sup> Caulfield, 264.

<sup>215</sup> Fred Rogers Center archivist, Emily Uhrin, posits that this letter was likely an appeal for funding so that the program could go national and thus likely written in 1967. In 1968, the program did go national.

<sup>216</sup> McFarland, "To Whom It May Concern."

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> See Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970). See also Henry Giroux, "Paolo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism," Henry Giroux website, [http://www.henryagiroux.com/online\\_articles/Paulo\\_friere.htm](http://www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/Paulo_friere.htm).

to address their students as persons and not simply as students. In this model, both the affective and cognitive aspects of the human person are understood as integrated; as such, teachers cannot attend only to the student's cognitive learning needs but adopt a holistic pedagogical practice.

As a professor of psychology and child development, McFarland and her analysis of children's reactions to the program hold immense weight in assessing the program's educational worth. She notes how the original songs Rogers sings on the program refer to the things of life that are very important to children. "Reference to the natural feelings of childhood evokes the children's awareness of their inner experience. The artistry of the program stimulates children's interest in the world around them and therefore fosters their learning," she writes.<sup>219</sup> Here McFarland points to two fundamental aspects of the program – assisting in articulating children's "natural" feelings in order to help them acknowledge and understand them (which Rogers refers to as "coping" in his Yale speech), and representing in dramatic form various everyday aspects of the child's world in order to promote learning and the development of healthy and non-threatening relationships with others. McFarland's appreciation of Rogers' artistry concurs with his own sense of the objectives of his creation. "Our program is not designed to avoid all anxiety-arousing themes," Rogers writes. "We deal with the beginnings of life as well as life's closure and many of the feelings in between."<sup>220</sup> Rogers thus models behaviors on his program that allow children and adults to deal with difficult and conflicting emotions and to choose non-violent behaviors. Indeed, he seems to have discovered how to touch what is "invisible to the eyes," that is to say, the child's inner world and experience.

---

<sup>219</sup> McFarland, "To Whom it May Concern."

<sup>220</sup> Rogers, "Yale," 2.

In perhaps the most persuasive and revealing part of her letter, McFarland discusses her observations of children watching *MRN*. By describing how children tend to respond to Rogers' directed questions by speaking to the television set, she provides evidence that Rogers' interpersonal approach is, in fact, effective and not simply a theoretical communication strategy on the part of the show's producers. In confirmation of Rogers' achievement of the dimension of communication theorized by Horton and Wohl as the "parasocial," she further notes that when Rogers says goodbye at the end of the program, children respond with behavior similar to when they are separated from a "meaningful adult." Horton and Wohl note in their article about parasocial interaction that,

The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to those in a primary group. The most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way.<sup>221</sup>

In McFarland's letter, however, she seeks to demonstrate the Rogers' relationship to his viewer is unique, while Horton and Wohl argue that this interaction seems to be happening at a broader level. As we will see in the third chapter when we examine the fan letters, it would appear that *MRN*, and Rogers specifically, succeeds in developing a deep, inner bond with many of his viewers that is relatively uncommon in the sphere of television performers and that refers us back to the art of touching what is "invisible to the eye."

In chapter two, I will explore the ways that Rogers theorizes and describes the execution of his communication practice as a kind of dialogical relationship with his

---

<sup>221</sup> Horton and Wohl, 215.



viewer by way of an interpersonal ethos of mutuality. I posit that the employment of this dialogical approach in combination with Rogers' interpersonal ethos of mutuality is fundamental in accounting for the deeply affectionate responses viewers tend to have to the program. McFarland's multi-dimensional analysis of the children's behavioral responses to the show's intimate communication efficacy demonstrate the detailed intellectual and holistic perspective that she deployed in contributing to and understanding the program and its effects and affects on children.

McFarland's analysis was critical to the creation, development, and maintenance of the program over time, as *MRN* emerged from the special collaborative relationship that Rogers formed with her in the 1960s, when he became her student. As a unique pedagogical endeavor that employs a dialogical communication process between host and viewer predicated by a constant acknowledgement of mutuality, it is important to highlight the fact that much of the program's "curriculum" is born out of dialogical, collaborative engagement between McFarland (teacher) and Rogers (student). Here we can see another instance of teacher/student relationship that points to aspects of Friere's work that stress the critical importance of dialogue and collaborative engagement between teacher and student. In this dynamic, both persons ostensibly inform and teach each other through the exchange of knowledges in reciprocal, penetrating, discussion.

Although she does not tread deeply into the subject of child development in her letter, McFarland touches upon important concepts within the burgeoning field. In particular, she notes how empathic Rogers behaves with his viewers as well as the ways that Rogers' "artistry" stimulates his viewers' curiosity about the world around them. She notes in her observations of child viewers of *MRN* that after the program ends, children

respond as if they have been separated from a “meaningful adult.” These details allude to McFarland’s keen understanding of child development, especially in regards to research on development, transactional family relations, and attachment that emerged in the late 1960s through the work of John Bowlby and others. Bowlby described the concept of attachment as a context of development necessary for children to experience healthy growth. It understands the early parent-child relationship as critically important to child development and calls attention to the ways that transactions between the individual child and her multiple primary relationships and contexts influence development.<sup>222</sup> Within this model of understanding, the first five years of life are the most rapid period for development and thus critically important because “it sets either a strong or fragile stage for what follows.”<sup>223</sup>

Bowlby described the attachment process as having three primary functions for child development – it provides a crucial sense of security, it assists in the regulation of affect and arousal, and it promotes the expression of feelings and communication. Attachment develops through relational transactions between infant/toddler and the parent during which the infant communicates an essential need – to be fed, to be played with, to be comforted – and the parent responds. When proceeding in the best possible way, these transactions will be mutually reinforcing, synchronous behaviors by the parent and infant; they will have a high degree of “mutual involvement;” they will be attuned to one another’s feeling states; and attentiveness and empathy will be consistently expressed by the parent.<sup>224</sup> What is key here in thinking about the performance of Mister Rogers, as

---

<sup>222</sup> Jay Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 2. Separation* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>223</sup> Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah Phillips, quoted in Douglas Davies, *Child Development: A Practitioner’s Guide*, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>224</sup> Davies, 10.

noted in McFarland's letter, is that he enacts this role as a trustworthy adult-parental figure on the screen. As we will see further in our examination of *MRN* episodes, Rogers is caring and careful to speak to his viewers in an empathic way that involves mutual recognition combined with a soothing message and tone. In a secure attachment, the mutual recognition of arousal by the parent helps the infant/toddler to develop her own ability to regulate her arousal. It is thus through this experience of empathy, mutual recognition, and soothing that the infant/toddler internalizes strategies for self-soothing. Such successful self-regulation of emotions helps the child to feel capable and confident in controlling distress and negative emotions.<sup>225</sup> All this is part-in-parcel of Rogers' objective of teaching the child "healthy" coping strategies.

As noted in David Davies *Child Development* (2004) primer, secure attachment provides the child with a base for exploration of his worldly surroundings. That is to say, when a child feels secure in his/her attachment with the parent or primary care-giver, she exudes confidence when engaging in worldly, exploratory actions. If the child feels insecure in the primary relationship, she, consumed by the anxiety produced by the insecurity of the attachment, is less confident in his exploration of the world. Scroufe notes that

the dyadic infant-caregiver organization precedes and gives rise to the organization that is the self...the self-organization, in turn, has significance for ongoing adaptation and experience, including late social behavior...each personality, whether healthy or disordered, is the product of the history of vital relationships.<sup>226</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> Davies, 9.

<sup>226</sup> L. Alan Scroufe, quoted in Davies, 21. While this details one school of interpretation, it is important to note that this understanding has become the predominant view of child development in the U.S. and best coincides, as I show in this dissertation, with Rogers' views and approach to the social-emotional on *MRN*.

With this understanding of the critical elements of attachment as it relates to healthy child development, we can see the ways in which Rogers' efforts on *MRN* aim to provide very young children with a primary adult relationship in which the adult, "Mister Rogers," offers the viewer affirming attachment responses to his viewers on a daily, ritualized basis. McFarland's identification of Rogers' ethos of dyadic mutuality, encouragement of play and curiosity with the world, empathic tone, involvement and attunement serve to emphasize the critical ways in which he performs, from a child development perspective, the role of an assuring, ideal primary-care giver for his viewers.

In his essay on the making of children's culture, Stephen Kline discusses the ways that during the nineteenth century, children became gradually more and more excluded from key areas of life where they had formerly held an active place. Throughout the century, he writes, the "cultural matrix of socialization" was profoundly changing such that children moved from being active participants in the family economy and public life to a sheltered position in which they were granted both rights of protection from the abuses of work life and a separate institutional space (i.e. the school). During this period, the idea of family and school as 'socializing' agencies responsible for molding children into citizens and civilized beings through learning and experience grew into prominence. As such, a view emerged that sought to lessen the idea of dominating the child's will and instead promote protection of the child's innocence by guiding him in the "proper" trajectory of eventual conformity through "more conscious and civilized means."

Implicit in this new attitude towards childhood was a gradual shirking away from the notion of control towards an approach that sought to instill models of self-control in children. This attitude conceived of civilization

as expanding its hold around a core of transmitted moral (Christian) precepts.<sup>227</sup>

Here we can put into perspective the assumptions about children and child-rearing present in postwar child development theories and practice. It is important to note that though Spock, writing in the 1940s, did not use the term “attachment,” he asserted that “the foundation of a healthy personality” begins with the formation of a close, secure bond between child and a caregiving adult (not only the parent but professional caregiver).<sup>228</sup> As Spock, Bowlby, Erikson, McFarland, and Rogers all stress, the primary role of the parental figure in the very young child’s upbringing is to make the child feel safe and secure in the world in order to help the child eventually self-manage any emotional stress he experiences. In this model, success in developing the underdeveloped mind of the young child comes through “nurturing, guidance and instruction,”<sup>229</sup> rather than the domination practices of old. Kline also notes that churches became vocal advocates of educationism and built schools to function as preferred spaces for children’s guidance. In this regard, Christian leaders argued that education ‘civilized’ the underdeveloped child and integrated everyday experience and book learning with moral rectitude.<sup>230</sup>

In the early twentieth century, liberating and democratizing possibilities for education were adopted by American educational theorists such as John Dewey, whose ideas became central in the Progressive Movement in schooling. Dewey’s theories put a premium on meaningful activity and participation in the classroom guided by a

---

<sup>227</sup> Stephen Kline, “The Making of Children’s Culture,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, 99. Note that this line of thinking is quite similar to that of Horace Bushnell.

<sup>228</sup> Caulfield, 265.

<sup>229</sup> Kline, 101.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

pragmatic, democratic agenda that sought the reflection of community life. During this same time, Friedrich Froebel's idea of free play and the notion of kindergarten gained wide acceptance as a model for early childhood socialization. Other social thinkers, educationalists, and psychologists participated in the rise of these new educational ideas asserting the special needs of children's underdeveloped minds and thus supporting the distinctive notion and role for children's culture as "a cultural environment that would support children's own developmental agendas."<sup>231</sup> Influenced further by Rousseauian romantic themes of the child as innocent, pure, and in need of protection, a metaphor of the garden became prominently favored by writers and artists of the early twentieth century.

In regards to the reading of McFarland's letter from a socio-historical perspective, it seems clear that she and Rogers attempted to carve out a space within the cultural discourse on children and media where they were able to capitalize on the growing authoritative dominance of "experts" in order to produce a specific type of "educational programming" that would function as a legitimate and credible alternative to commercial children's television entertainment. The letter also employs a language of moral concern for class, racial, and ethnic inequality in the United States that can be traced to the nation's Progressive movement, the likes of which were once again rising to political and discursive dominance in large part due to the reform initiatives of President Johnson's "Great Society." This lineage is important to note as many Progressives were motivated by religious beliefs in their advocacy of moral reforms (e.g., Prohibition, child labor, anti-trust) and Rogers, as we will later see, certainly saw his project as a form of ministry in

---

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 101.

addition to a child-development program. However, as we will see later in the dissertation, it would seem that Rogers eventually decided to broaden his speech to the dominant, secular discourse, perhaps in order to intervene and succeed in a postwar American culture in which the use of religious language was minimized in the interests of pluralism and liberalism.

### **Conclusion**

In examining and analyzing these documents and placing them in the socio-cultural context of the discussions regarding television and the family, the rhetoric of the “technological sublime,” the cultural critiques of the 1950s and 60s (regarding alienation, rampant individualism, loss of community bonds, unbridled consumption, etc.), Christian responses to mass entertainment, and postwar child development theory, I have contextualized and situated the approaches and aims of Rogers and McFarland in ways that reveal the curious paradox of the television medium’s parasocial affects. That is to say that in an increasingly alienating, advanced capitalist society, television promises to bring people closer together and to transcend the physical and temporal divides that exist in the new mass society. So too, the then novel theories on child development during the period stress the importance of creating and nurturing interpersonal bonds between adult caregivers and children. While Rogers and McFarland emphasize the unique opportunities for human connection that television affords and attempt to capitalize on such knowledge, that paradox of the simulacra—the perceived feelings of closeness and community that television inspires juxtaposed with the reality that real connections between screen actors and viewers are not actually being made—remains. In the next

chapter, I will discuss the ways that Rogers attempts to create this dialogical engagement with viewers, drawing upon and integrating his first-hand knowledge of child-adult interactions at the Arsenal Family Center with his Christian theological background, his knowledge of cutting edge child development theory, and his prescient understanding of the parasocial aspects of television communication.



## CHAPTER 2:

### Creating the Dialogic: Christianity, Child Development and the Parasocial

In a December 1, 1966 letter written to Miss Margaret Rasmussen, editor of the Association for Childhood Education International based in Washington, D.C., Margaret McFarland calls for the Association's help in notifying parents in select cities (i.e. Boston, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Schenectady, and San Francisco) of the debut of the new educational television program, "Misterogers Neighborhood."<sup>1</sup> McFarland praises Rogers as both a "talented dramatic artist" and "musician," and calls particular attention to his studies in child development in her own graduate program at the University of Pittsburgh. She notes Rogers' studious efforts to learn about child development "in order to make his communication with children appropriate for them" and specifically cites his direct work with children at the "Arsenal Child Study Center" as informing the quality content of his television programming.

According to McFarland, when Rogers first came to the graduate program, she found him "unusually observant and empathic with children," noting that he wrote "songs that spoke deeply to them." Notably, she articulates the Center's interest in Rogers' programs "as a mode of studying the significance of training in the dynamics of child development for the creative artist who is communicating with children." From her perspective, the "only way to combat inappropriate television for children is by the availability of good programs," like Misterogers Neighborhood, and she sees Rogers' creation of *MRN* as promising example of television artistry informed by new child

---

<sup>1</sup> Margaret McFarland to Margaret Rasmussen, 1 Dec. 1966, in Fred Rogers Archive, Folder "Prof. Early Endorse," Box EU68.

development knowledge In this regard, she asks Rassmussen if communication could be sent out to local groups of the Association for Childhood Education International in order to help create an audience for the new program. She then follows this request with another – to encourage parents and children to write either to Rogers or to their local station offices subsequent to viewing. This gesture, she explicitly notes, should help in the obtaining of continued interest in “the development of such programs on a national basis.” Further, she states, the evaluations of professionals who work with children are “helpful if written to Mr. Rogers at WQED.” “He is very eager to supply whatever insight is available to him in subsequent programs.”

McFarland’s letter captures well the collaborative and dialogic nature of *MRN*’s beginnings and the dynamics at work in Rogers’ professional life. As we will see in the following chapter, Rogers studied child development at the advanced level with rising experts in the field such as McFarland and Erik Erikson who, both then and now, are considered groundbreaking and are still very much relevant to contemporary understandings of the needs of children. Rogers became a student of McFarland while studying pastoral counseling at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where he attended graduate classes during his lunch break at Pittsburgh’s new community broadcasting station, WQED. In this regard, Rogers was simultaneously engaged in a multi-disciplinary dialectical practice of learning that involved television production and creation, child development theory and observation, and theological and pastoral study.

In this chapter, I continue my inquiry into Fred Rogers’ visionary and retrospective writings and articulations on television, children, and his televisual creation, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. In the first section, “Dialogical Beginnings: Divinity

School and the Arsenal Family Center,” I examine interviews with Rogers in which he and others who knew him discuss his work as a student of Margaret McFarland and practitioner at the Arsenal Family Center. I analyze the ways that methods of close observation (of children) and dialogical engagement (with children) produced knowledge about understanding and communicating with the very young that Rogers would employ and reenact on his program. In this novel approach led by Arsenal founders, Erik Erikson, Benjamin Spock, and McFarland, the teacher learns from observing how the child develops in her own subjectivity and social competence. This model is markedly opposite from the older anti-dialogical, behaviorist approaches employed by previous leading social-scientist, John Watson, who advocated an authoritarian, disciplinarian dynamic.

In the second section, “The Wounded Healer and the Mutuality of Holy Ground,” I examine critical anecdotes told by Rogers that detail two defining moments in his young life, in which he found healing through the development of an “I-Thou” relationship of mutuality and care. In recollecting both instances, one defined by his relationship to God and another defined by his relationship to an adolescent peer, he comes away with a profound understanding of the power of a dyadic communication characterized by acceptance, affirmation, compassion, and mutuality. I examine these anecdotes and the ways they serve as foundational parables and meaning-making narratives in Rogers’ life, drawing parallels with Henri Nouwen’s conception of the “wounded healer” as a ministerial who employs a Christ-like dynamic of empathy and ethical emotionality with the individuals in his care.

Next, in an effort to further examine and understand the child development theory at work in Rogers’ creation, I address Erik Erikson’s “8 Ages of Man” and place its

postulations on the early stages of childhood in conversation with the affective rhetorics at work in Rogers' conceptualization of *MRN*. I show how Rogers, with a keen understanding of the experience of mutual regulation and the role it plays in the life of the child, incorporates Erikson's emphasis on the adult's primary role of building trust, a sense of autonomy, and initiative in the young viewer.

In "Creativity and Agape: The Palimpsest of Feeling and Thinking," I address Rogers' dynamic and interdisciplinary understanding of child development and the human person from the perspective of education and its aims. I show how Rogers integrates novel child development theory on the importance of helping children develop a greater sense of awareness and self worth with a Christian understanding of the human being as created in the image of God and thus fundamentally creative, life-giving, and designed for social service. I further connect Rogers' philosophy of education to the ideas of John Dewey, a leader in the Progressive education movement who believed in the uniqueness of the individual and an educational imperative that directs learning toward contribution to democratic social life. Rogers reworks Erikson and Dewey's understandings of personhood and especially of young people through an incorporation of unconditional love and service to others in the Christian sense (i.e. agape, caritas). In doing so, I show how Rogers lays the groundwork for a pedagogy that places adults as child educators whose primary role must be to encourage creativity and foster the unique abilities of the individual within an ethos of community membership.

In "Parasocial Activity, Public Pedagogy and the *MRN* Intervention," I discuss how Rogers developed a sense of the parasocial with his viewer as part of a pedagogical communication strategy of dialectic interaction. Here, I emphasize Rogers' primary

concern of undeviating connection with the viewer and show how McFarland's analytical understanding of television as embedded in the family culture, Rogers' affective communication ethos, and the essential adult-child dyadic relationship served to further reify the *MRN* approach. I analyze the project from its place within the larger project of National Educational Television and its concerns with public pedagogy and the civic interest.

In "Rogers' Philosophy," I analyze Rogers' explicit vision for the program as articulated in an early document called "Philosophy," in which he articulates the principles, premises, and various foundational elements of the program. I show how, departing from a dynamic and sophisticated understanding of the needs of children, Rogers frames his overarching aim as showcasing the simple acts of finding wonder in life's experiences and places this aim in stark contrast with the commercial faire of the time, which he characterizes as escapist and violent.

In "An Anthropocentric Christian-based Intervention," I show how Rogers' modern, pluralistic approach to practicing his Presbyterian faith embraces a dialogical method of meeting people where they are – an approach in which the minister yields to the needs and concerns of the other rather than blindly asserting doctrine. I examine notes Rogers wrote in which he struggles to identify contemporary cultural problems and place them into conversation with the crux of various philosophies on the human person and human need. I show how Rogers' embraced a practice of listening and responding inspired by his (Protestant, democratic, American) belief in individual freedom and the worth of the individual that he identified as running counter to what he perceived as practices of manipulation in commercially-based television.

Finally, I conclude by pointing to the ways that Rogers created a third way response to his keen reading of spirit of the times. In rejecting both the pietist and neo-orthodox wings of the contemporary American Presbyterian Church and by creating a theologically sound argument for evangelization grounded in the healing of hearts through an anthropocentric orientation characterized by “I-Thou” communication, Rogers is able to make a significant cultural intervention on a mass scale that reflects his own negotiation with a new postwar, increasingly secular cultural environment.

### **Dialogic Beginnings:**

#### **Divinity School and the Arsenal Family & Children’s Center**

Fred Rogers began his relationship with Margaret B. McFarland while in Divinity School at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Starting in 1954, he took courses for his Master’s degree in Divinity on a part-time basis for eight years while working full-time producing *The Children’s Corner*.<sup>2</sup> The Seminary eventually required that he take a course in counseling for his degree. When he communicated his interest in working with children, the course instructor suggested that he contact Dr. McFarland, who was both a professor of early childhood development and psychology at the University of Pittsburgh and the director of the recently-established Arsenal Family and Children’s Center (1953).

---

<sup>2</sup> Prior to the creation of *MRN*, Fred Rogers produced and co-starred (behind the scenes as a puppeteer) in the WQED children’s program, *The Children’s Corner*. He co-wrote both the scripts and the music with on-air host and the program’s star, Josie Carey. The program consisted of conversations between Carey and Rogers’ puppets—Daniel S. Tiger, Henrietta Pussycat, King Friday, and Xscape Owl—who later carried on their respective roles in *MRN*. In 1955, the show, which launched in April of 1954, won a Sylvania Award for the best locally produced children’s program in the country. Later, Rogers and Carey produced a similar show for NBC Saturday morning distribution (See Archive of American Television website, “Children’s Corner,” <http://emmytvlegends.org/interviews/shows/childrens-corner-the>). The program was described in some print media as a “calm” alternative to the “frantic antics” of “the usual” television programming for children (“In Review,” *Broadcasting, Television* 50.1 [2 Jan. 1956]: 14).

For eight years, Rogers' course of study at the Seminary overlapped and comingled with his empirical studies on children and child development. It is not surprising to see that in his television ministry, there occurs an amalgam of his study in both institutions.

The Arsenal provided a space where graduate students could study child development and McFarland encouraged Rogers to employ the Center for this task. He subsequently spent many hours watching, listening, and learning from the children at the Arsenal.<sup>3</sup> The Arsenal employed a methodology based on theory and practice that relied on the close observation of children.<sup>4</sup> Children attended school at the Arsenal, while teachers, scholars, doctors, and graduate students taught and observed them in order to gain further understanding and to formulate and reformulate child development practices. Deploying an empirical methodology, the Center was set up as an educational laboratory where adult caretakers taught and learned from the very young children. The pedagogical phenomenon occurring at the Arsenal was innovative in many ways but its distinct particularity is in the dialogical setup where the teacher learns from observing how the child develops in her own subjectivity and social competence.

As a graduate student, Rogers' engagement with the children at the Arsenal was informed by McFarland's expertise in the field and functioned as a practice of an ongoing case study. The framework of Arsenal's model consisted of participant observation practices followed by dyadic and small group meetings between McFarland and Rogers (and sometimes other graduate students) in which oral debriefing and analysis would occur, resulting in an ongoing, dialectical form of experiential and dialogic education.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Lessons From Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, directed by Judith A. Rubin (Pittsburgh, PA: Expressive Media, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The innovation and efficacy of the observational method was first developed by Jean Piaget in the 1920s and later expanded and refined by Erik Erikson.

In this environment, communicative learning and meaning is the result of the interplay of communication and action. Calvin Schrag discusses this phenomenon at length in his 1986 book, *Communicative Praxis and the Scope of Subjectivity*.<sup>5</sup> It is within this practice of learning and meaning creation that *MRN* develops, evolves, and is practically maintained over the years. At its heart, the engagement at Arsenal was a foundational, dialogical education process in which adults learned from children through interaction and observation and then convened with each another to discuss what they had learned. In both steps, it is through a communication process of dialogue and conversation that all persons involved learn – preschool Arsenal children, scholars and psychologists, and graduate students like Rogers. Rogers would take this lesson of learning and meaning creation into the conception and production of *MRN*. Indeed, I maintain that it is one of the secrets of the immense success of the program not only with children, but adults.

This dynamic between adults and children at the Arsenal, is one that gives voice and worth to young children within the educational realm and enables them to make sense of everyday life, contrasts with the dominant child-rearing advice given by John Watson and others in the late 1920s. In Watson's view, the child did not have the capacity to make sense of his experience. Because of this, the meaning of life had to be transferred from adults to children in learning environments where adults had control of all aspects of learning.<sup>6</sup> Watson wanted to impart upon children and transfer to them bits

---

<sup>5</sup> See Ronald C. Arnett, *Dialogic Education: Conversation Between Persons* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 18, for a discussion of Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Note that today, at top schools of education worldwide, ideas similar to these that emerged mid-century, are becoming of great interest and gaining much praise. See discussions of "Informal Education" in Lucy Green, et al., *Music, Informal Learning and the School* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2013); Patricia M. Greenfield, "Technology and Informal Education: What Is Taught, What Is Learned," *Science* 323.5910



of learning derived from the wisdom of the adults. Watson wanted to develop a scientific study of human behavior, which he coined “behaviorism.”<sup>7</sup> Nothing could be farther from Rogers’ philosophy of child development and education.

Prior to employing child subjects in his research, Watson used animals to study behavior. In his most famous and widely read book, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (1928), he instructed parents never to kiss or hug their child; he advised the shaking of hands between parent and child in the morning; and he suggested that parents give their child a pat on the head after they accomplished a difficult task.<sup>8</sup> Contributing to the conventional wisdom of the early twentieth century, Watson’s approach offers a disciplinarian and authoritarian model<sup>9</sup> of dealing with both children and parents. Watson’s model calls for disciplining both parents and children, for the objective is “not more babies but better brought up babies.”<sup>10</sup> If we think of Watson’s approach as an educational model, we can see characteristics of what Friere coined ‘the banking model of education.’ Freire objected to teaching standard that promotes a kind of dictatorial, one-way, narrative style of instruction.<sup>11</sup> With its notable absence of mutuality, Watson’s

---

(2009): 69-71; V.A. Ivaniushina and D.A. Aleksandrow, “Socialization Through Informal Education: The Extracurricular Activities of Russian Schoolchildren,” *Russian Education and Society* 57.4 (2015): 189-213; Kimberly Sheridan et al., “Designing Games, Designing Roles: A Student of Youth Agency in an Urban Informal Education Program,” *Urban Education Program*, 48.5 (2013): 734-58.

<sup>7</sup> Note that part of this line of thinking, as seen in operative conditioning, is that behavior creates internalized structures, rather than vice versa.

<sup>8</sup> John Broadus Watson and Rosalie Alberta Rayner Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1928), 81.

<sup>9</sup> Watson’s approach continued to promote an authoritarian style of parenting first articulated by L. Emmett Holt’s *The Care and Feeding of Children* (New York: D. Appleton, 1894). Holt suggested methods such as forced weaning, instituting toilet training during infancy, and the restriction of participation in play with infants. See entry on “Benjamin Spock,” in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Childhood Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Watson and Watson, 9.

<sup>11</sup> In U.S. schools, this style dates back to Joseph Mayer Rice’s identification in the late nineteenth century of a widespread common school “educational” approach that embraced “common drilling” and recitations in often overpopulated classrooms. Epitomizing this attitude, “a Chicago teacher,” wrote Rice, “rehearsing her pupils in a ‘concert drill,’ harangued [her students] with the command: ‘Don’t stop to think, tell me what you know!’” (quoted in Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in*

model is rooted in a dynamic of domination and control in which the child is an inchoate and lesser subjectivity.

Freire identifies the first characteristic of antidiological setup as “the necessity for conquest.” For Freire, the act of conquest, “which reduces persons to the status of things is necrophilic.”<sup>12</sup> He posits that liberating action is “dialogical in nature” and argues that dialogue cannot take place without critical thinking, a process that empowers and inspires agency and worth amongst those involved. Critical thinking, which is achieved through a process of dialogue, yields an indivisible solidarity between the world and people. Further, such thinking generates a perception of reality as transformation and process rather than as static. This outcome is key to learning and growing processes to which those at the Arsenal appear dedicated. In this framework, relationships are organized within a “with-and” dynamic, in contrast to Watson’s superior-inferior (hierarchical) one.<sup>13</sup> Such reliance on persons in dialoguing relationship with others has been later discussed by Arnett. Following Freire and Buber, Arnett observes that the use of “the term *conversation* in conjunction with education suggests that dialogic education is a

---

*American Education, 1876-1957* [New York: Vintage, 1964], 5). Rice’s investigative reporting on the common school system was the precursor to the Progressive Education Movement, of which Rogers arguably inherited much of his thought and approach. For example, around this time in Indianapolis, “progressive” teachers tried to introduce into the curriculum “the idea of unification,” an approach similar to today’s “interdisciplinarity,” in which several subjects were combined so that students can more easily discover how subjects were interrelated. In an Indiana school, Rice observed artistic practices of drawing, painting, and clay modeling alongside a pedagogical communication approach that encouraged students “to be helpful to one another” (5). Rice and others who read his work decried the prevalence of the “mechanical” in the system, referring to rote memorization and “busy work” (6). I will address one of Rogers’ key writings on education, which is strikingly similar in content to those of Rice, later in this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1970), 119.

<sup>13</sup> Watson and his contemporaries who espoused similar authoritarian methods of parenting have been since characterized by Harvard Medical School’s Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, a contemporary pediatrician-author, as employing a didactic style of advice-giving. In the *New York Times* obituary (17 Mar., 1998) of Benjamin Spock, Brazelton noted that Spock changed the arena of parenting and family dynamics by empowering mothers and fathers, offering them choices and “encouraging them to think things out for themselves.”

collective and active process, not one conducted in isolation.”<sup>14</sup> Education thus, can never be conceived as a solitary activity but rather requires the “bringing together of ideas, relationships, and values within an organizational culture in symbolic interaction with the goal of transmitting and understanding information,”<sup>15</sup> even when behavioral scientists like Watson posit the sovereign and solitary authority of the master teacher.

In his co-authored book *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference*, Arnett and his co-authors expand upon his earlier analysis on the question of pedagogy and ethics in a way that sheds light on Rogers’ early praxis. The key characteristic of the dialogic approach to communication ethics, according to Arnett et.al, is the primary importance of “meaning that emerges in discourse between persons.” Although *MRN* is not a referent for Arnett, his findings from his classroom experience coincide with Rogers’ own vision for a communication ethics.<sup>16</sup> According to Arnett,

A dialogic communication ethics acknowledges multiple goods that give rise to and emerge in ongoing conversations, protecting and promoting the good of learning. A dialogic approach to communication ethics, or a dialogic ethic, recognizes that human beings live within an ongoing conversation that began well before a specific interpersonal interaction begins and is never concluded. Such an ethic protects and promotes the unexpected revelation that emerges between and among persons, a revelation owned by no one and meaningfully important to many.<sup>17</sup>

Rogers took intentional measures to insert himself and the characters on his program within a family dynamic through a dialogic and interpersonal communication ethos in which he presented himself in respectful and caring conversation with one viewer. My research shows that Rogers was careful to maintain this conversational language and tone

---

<sup>14</sup> Arnett, *Dialogic Education*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Arnett, *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

throughout the program, in which he asks his listeners questions and prompts them to reflect on the ideas and questions he has posed. At the end of the episode, he offers a song of temporary farewell, singing “....but I’ll be back when the day is through and I’ll have more ideas for you; and you’ll have things you’ll want to talk about, I will too.”<sup>18</sup> Here Rogers makes clear that his conversation with the viewer is ongoing and emphasizes the relationship of mutuality that binds them together as communication partners in a dialogic dyadic journey of trying to make meaning out of the everyday encounter between people and the world, albeit virtually.

Moreover, at some time during his observations at the Arsenal, Rogers discovered the secret power of television – that while television is a mass medium of communication, as understood by the broadcasting networks that utilized it, it is simultaneously an intensely personal medium in which the viewer unconsciously conceives of himself in dialogue with the characters/personalities depicted on the screen. In this regard, communicating in everyday language and within the strictures of the common culture is most apt. Even though he has been trained at the advanced level in the social sciences and theology, Rogers never attempts to communicate with his viewer using the language of sociology, theology, philosophy, or even psychology. He always chooses the anecdote/parable, followed by an analytical and interpretive comment, perhaps in imitation of the teaching style of Jesus.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Rogers, “The Weekend Song,” *The Neighborhood Archive*, [http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/weekend\\_song.html](http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/weekend_song.html). Note here the power of Rogers’ use of the interpellative “you,” as exemplified in the famous military recruitment poster “Uncle Sam Wants You!,” even though he uses mass media that would seem to employ a plural “you” (or in Pittsburghese, “yinz”).

In an interview with Karen Herman of the American Academy of Film and Television, Rogers tells the story of his friend, Jeff, a mentally disabled man who worked in the pool area of the recreation center where Rogers swam. Rogers describes Jeff's recent and intense interest in the untimely death of John F. Kennedy Jr. in July of 1999. He recalls asking Jeff that very morning of the interview, why he was so interested in all the media coverage regarding Kennedy's death. To this Jeff responded, referring to the Kennedys, "well, I grew up with them. I was nine-years-old when his daddy died." Rogers then asks Jeff how old he was when his dad died. "Eleven," responded Jeff. Rogers then offers his own interpretation and analysis of this interaction to Herman, stating,

I think that what I want to say about all of that is that television is an exceedingly personal medium. It reflects the story back to us. And the story we bring to the screen, whatever we happen to be watching, we bring our own story to the screen. And so consequently, it's like a dialogue. And there are those people who sometimes say that television doesn't affect us all that much. Well, all I can say is then why would advertisers pay so much money to put their message on a medium that doesn't affect us all that much? I do feel that what we see and hear on the screen is part of who we become.<sup>19</sup>

From this anecdote, Rogers draws three key analytical points that guide the conception and vision of *MRN*. The first is that despite the technological aspect of the mass medium of communication, it is in fact "an exceedingly personal medium." The second is that the medium "reflects the story back to us" and provokes a dialogue due to the fact that "we bring our own story to the screen." Third, the result is thus a dialogue. It is through this understanding of television that he seeks to establish his dialogic communication ethics and aesthetics. In a way, Rogers is recovering for the analysis of television the old

---

<sup>19</sup> Rogers, interview by Karen Herman, Archive of American Television and Film, 22 July, 1999, <http://emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/fred-rogers>.

Aristotelian theory of catharsis, in which Aristotle posited that people can see the drama of their own lives in the play (theater). To a certain extent, Stuart Hall's concept of encoding-decoding is also relevant here.

In Hall's analysis of television texts and their reception, encoding is defined as the process by which signs are organized into cultural codes of meaning. Decoding refers to the process by which "readers" organize and make sense of the codes to generate meaning from them. In regards to the relationship between texts, textual production, and textual reception more specifically, Hall's encoding-decoding communication model posits that the meaning of texts is polysemic – that is to say that there is no *one* meaning of any televisual (or otherwise) text. Rather, meaning making is a subjective process that occurs in a dynamic, interactive communication exchange in which readers bring their own knowledge and experiences to a text, resulting in a variety of interpretation and meaning-making through textual engagement.<sup>20</sup> In this way, Rogers sees himself as entering into a dialogue with each viewer, who comes to him with his/her own story, experiences, and understanding of life and the world.<sup>21</sup>

Within this framework, John Fiske wrote one of his most important studies on television reception in which he claimed that "popular culture is not consumption, it is

---

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love, and Paul Willis (London: Routledge, 1991), 128-38.

<sup>21</sup> In her observational study of Australian children watching television in their homes, Patricia Palmer has mapped the variety of children's behavioral patterns for viewing. She found that children had a propensity for engaging with television programming in an active way, such as performing, reenacting, and reinterpreting the content usually as a bonding interaction with other family members and friends. Her work is useful in illustrating the range of children's responses and reception of television and shows how rich a source of material programming can be. It also shows how children, in their interaction with the device, are far from passive, as the conventional wisdom historically has suggested. See Patricia Palmer, *Lively Audience: A Study of Children Around the TV Set* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 135, and Ellen Seiter, "Children's Desires/Mother's Dilemmas," in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 313. Rogers was prescient in his understanding of the social and cognitive activities experienced during television viewing.

culture—the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system.”<sup>22</sup> Clearly concerned about his perception of the rise of a coarse popular culture, Rogers appears to recognize this process of meaning-making through televisual interactivity. In this regard, he takes great care to construct an interpersonal dynamic between he and the viewer with, perhaps, the hope of breaking through a cacophony of voices in the popular culture so as to more effectively capture attention and deliver his counter-cultural ethos. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that by employing a form of dialogical, invitational rhetoric,<sup>23</sup> a technique that allows him to break the fourth wall and connect interpersonally with his audience, Rogers hopes to contribute his voice to the circulation of meanings and pleasures within the cultural realm of discourse.

The interpersonal and dialogical communication method in which he grounds the program appears to be an extension of his own social behaviors in everyday life and vice-versa. This aspect of *MRN* in relation to the character of “Mister Rogers” and the person of Fred Rogers is most interesting in regards the parasocial. “For a brief interval,” Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl write, the fictional takes precedence over the actual, as the actor becomes identified with the fictional role in the magic of the theatre.”

This glamorous confusion of identities is temporary: the worlds of fact and fiction meet only for the moment. And the actor, when he takes his bows at the end of the performance, crosses back over the threshold into the

---

<sup>22</sup> John Fiske, quoted in Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz, *Television Studies* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 65.

<sup>23</sup> In their famous article, “Beyond Persuasion,” Sonja Foss and Cindy L. Griffin propose an alternative rhetoric to the traditional “patriarchal” understanding of persuasion which favors changing and thus dominating others. In this regard, they posit the notion of an “invitational rhetoric” rooted in “feminist principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination,” interested not in changing the opinion of another, but in achieving mutual understanding (Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 62 [1995]: 2). In offering an invitation to understanding, the primary communication modes entail the contribution of perspectives and the creation of “conditions of safety, value, and freedom” (2). Although I do not deal the notion of invitational rhetoric as posited by Foss and Griffin further in my piece, I do recognize its strong presence in Rogers’ rhetorical approach and its parallels to the dialogic communication ethic.

matter-of-fact world.<sup>24</sup>

But as we will see, Rogers was intentional about “playing it straight,” in the sense that he would not play a different role on his television show other than his real-world self. This choice indeed has psychological consequences for viewer perception in regards to understanding the ways that the parasocial interaction between Rogers and his viewers developed. To what extent, if at all, does this transparency affect the way that his viewer sees and understands him? We will address this question in depth in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, in which I examine fan letters written to Rogers.

While Horton and Wohl did not investigate the experiential aspects of the parasocial experiences of viewers in detail, contemporary social scientists Til Hartmann and Charlotte Goldhoorn set about doing so in their 2011 article, “Horton and Wohl Revisited: Exploring Viewers’ Experience of Parasocial Interaction” by isolating and examining “the feeling of being in parasocial interaction.”<sup>25</sup> In building on Horton and Wohl’s assumption that parasocial experience is strongly tied to viewers’ mindreading processes that occur when humans find themselves in a given social situation and automatically attempt to infer the “mental states” of the persons present, the authors efficiently and articulately detail a plethora of subsequent research that shows how parasocial experience, as in any other social concurrence, is likely to be accompanied with an “immediate sense of mutual awareness and mutual attention with the TV performer.” Notably, they review the ways that parasocial researchers have pointed to the addressing style of the television performer as critical in gauging the levels of parasocial

---

<sup>24</sup> Horton and Wohl, 216.

<sup>25</sup> Tilo Hartmann and Charlotte Goldhoorn, “Horton and Wohl Revisited: Exploring Viewers’ Experience of Parasocial Interaction,” *Journal of Communication* 61.6 (2011): 1105.



interaction experienced by viewers. Citing Jonathan Cohen's 2001 article, "Defining Identification: A Theoretical Look at the Identification of Audiences with Media Characters,"<sup>26</sup> Hartmann and Goldhoorn note that similar to real interaction, the performer's addressing style "seems part and parcel to the initiation and maintenance of parasocial interaction." It would seem that during the time Rogers spent at the Arsenal, where he engaged in communication with very young children, he was able to hone a particular style of address that reached this particular underdeveloped group with remarkable efficacy.

Informed by his interactive and observational work at the Arsenal, where he engaged in group and dyadic communication with children, Rogers developed on *MRN* a dialogical ethos in which he attended to the inner needs and desires of small children through conversation. In a 2015 Public Radio International article, *MRN* producer Hedda Sharapan is quoted saying, "what made Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood so different is the time Fred spent listening to children and trying to understand, what are they worried about. What are they thinking about? What helps them feel better?"<sup>27</sup> In this way, he reenacts conversation with viewers on his program inspired by dialogues based on his empirical interactions with preschoolers at the Arsenal.

According to McFarland and other colleagues of Rogers at the Arsenal, such interactions are driven by a striving to meet the young child where he is, and to provide for him an attentive, dialogical adult response lead by the primary intentions of building

---

<sup>26</sup> See Jonathan Cohen, "Defining Identification: A Theoretical Look at the Identification of Audiences with Media Characters," *Mass Communication and Society* 4.3 (2001): 245-64.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Dooe, "How Mister Rogers shaped what it means to grow up – and live in Pittsburgh," *Public Radio International*, Arts, Culture, and Media section, 25 Sep., 2015, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-09-25/how-mr-rogers-shaped-what-it-means-grow-and-live-pittsburgh>.

greater understanding and trust, and learning from the interaction. Informed by Arnett's discussion of dialogic communication ethics, we can see that in this situation, meaning is created in discourse between persons in which knowledge and the path to understanding is found within the unique subjectivity of each participant. Further, in such a communication ethic, primary import is given to the actions of listening and response. In particular, for Rogers, both at the Arsenal and in *MRN*, value and power are bestowed onto the child interlocutor whose unique subjectivity is praised and regarded as special to Rogers. Such a move reverses the traditional power dynamic by placing value and agency with the child and thus counters both the traditional banking style of education criticized by Freire, in which teachers, the classroom arbiters of power, "deposit" "knowledge" into the minds of passive students, and Watson's model.

### **The Wounded Healer and the Mutuality of Holy Ground**

In several speeches and interviews, Rogers reveals formative stories from his childhood and adolescence that point to the importance of an ethos of mutuality and dialogue in his life. His reverse transfer of social and pedagogical power to the viewer/student of his program, e.g. the less powerful person in the relationship, appears to be a position of critical importance to Rogers for personal, experiential reasons. In order to understand this perspective more fully, let us take a look at a 1997 commencement speech Rogers gave to the Memphis Theological Seminary entitled "Invisible Essentials." In it, Rogers, writing at the age of 69, reflects back on the critical moments in his life when he found his calling as a communicator. In the middle of this speech, Rogers breaks into a parabolic anecdote. He recounts the times when as a young

child, he was bullied. As a young boy, Rogers he overweight and timid. He was afraid to go to school each day and thus, in his own words, “a perfect target for ridicule.”

One day, after being released from school early, he decided to walk home. Soon after he left campus, he noticed that he was being followed by a group of boys, who quickly gained on him while taunting him verbally. “Freddy, hey fat Freddy,” they shouted, “we’re going to get you, Freddy.” Rogers recalls breaking into a sprint, hoping that he would run fast enough to make it to the house of a widowed neighbor. He recalls praying that she would be home so that he would be taken in and sheltered from the ensuing threat. She was indeed home and Rogers found “refuge.”<sup>28</sup> Offering refuge and safety became a hallmark of *MRN*. Rogers introduces himself and greets the viewer in every show with a song that proclaims the beauty of the neighborhood and offers an invitation the spend time together. “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood, won’t you be mine?....won’t you be mine?....won’t you be my neighbor?” This invitation to be a neighbor, to be “like each other,” is one of the primary reasons why viewers were so moved by and devoted to Rogers and to *MRN*, as we will see in the fan letters (chapter 4 of the dissertation).<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Fred Rogers, “Invisible Essentials,” speech, Memphis Theological Seminary, 10 May, 1997, Fred Rogers Archive, Folder “1997,” Box EU74.

<sup>29</sup> Amy Hollingsworth speculates that Rogers understanding of what it means to be a neighbor owes much to his friendship with the Benedictine monks at Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. She writes that the monks used to visit both Rogers grandparents and parents when Fred was growing up. “It was through the monks and their work in his community of neighbors that a young Fred Rogers learned to heed Saint Benedict’s call to respect and revere the whole of God’s creation because the divine presence is everywhere.” She adds that “for Fred and for Mister Rogers, this was the work of God: seeing the eternal in your neighborhood, that divine presence that allows us to show mercy to our neighbor and to receive it” (Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers: Spiritual Insights from the World’s Most Beloved Neighbor* [Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2005], 79).

Embedded in the anecdote of this speech is the archetype of the “wounded healer”<sup>30</sup> as Rogers reflects on the feelings of resentment and pain that he harbored for years due to his childhood experiences of bullying.<sup>31</sup> He writes that although the authority figures in his life advised him to ignore the taunts and to act as if the insults did not bother him, Rogers came to realize that denying his feelings betrayed the authenticity of his experience. “What I actually did was mourn. I cried whenever I was alone.”<sup>32</sup> Such “mourning,” as he describes it, set him on a path of profound introspection, in which he found in music the possibilities for genuine expression and transformation. “After a lot of sadness,” he wrote, “I began a lifelong search for what is essential.”<sup>33</sup>

Rogers writes that he came to realize that acknowledging the pain he felt as a result of the bullying was critical to his own healing and development. “Somehow along the way,” Rogers writes, “I caught the belief that God cares, too; that the divine presence cares for those of us who are hurting and that His presence is everywhere.”<sup>34</sup> Although Rogers, in his public persona as the creator of *MRN*, does not often emphasize his faith in God, his life and philosophy and artistic production was led by his belief in a caring and merciful divinity.

When I ask for your prayers, I didn’t mean to be vague about the need. I always pray that through whatever we produce (whatever we say and do), some word that is heard might ultimately be God’s word. That is my main concern. All the others are minor compared to that. As you know, in this business there are countless decisions every day (every hour!) and I solicit

---

<sup>30</sup> Henry J. Nouwen, a Catholic priest and psychologist coined the term “wounded healer” in his 1972 book *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972). In it he suggests that ministers make their own emotional wounds known as a source of healing for those under their care. Nouwen was a good friend and spiritual mentor of Fred Rogers.

<sup>31</sup> For a critical examination of the effects of bullying on the psyche, see Laura Martocci, *Bullying: The Social Destruction of the Self* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Rogers, “Invisible Essentials,” 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

your prayers for guidance from above in all the decisions which must be made all the time.<sup>35</sup>

To the postmodern sensibility, rooted in suspicion, Rogers' spirituality might seem, if not naïve, unsophisticated. The fact remains, however, that for Rogers, the "caring nature of God" serves as the foundation of his life and work.

Rogers has stated that he sees the production of his children's television show as a space infused by the Holy Spirit where he, as a servant of God, strives to minister to the *deepest* and most *essential* needs of children—to be loved and accepted just as they are.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, Rogers appears to understand the relationship between God and human beings, and the relationship between Martin Buber's "I and Thou"<sup>37</sup> as a dialogical process of communication<sup>38</sup> in which both sender and receiver are engaged in a mutual

---

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Hollingsworth, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Hollingsworth, *Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*

<sup>37</sup> In Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1937), Buber posits a primary relationships (I-Thou) that is "characterized by openness, reciprocity, and a deep sense of personal involvement" (*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], s.v. "Martin Buber").

<sup>38</sup> For Mikhail Bakhtin, a text is a space for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices and modes of discourse, all of which are not just verbal but constitute in fact a socio-historical phenomenon. Thus, the text is always an intertext. It does not express a readymade and immanent autonomous individuality. Instead, the prose-text emerges in the course of the dialogue between different socio-languages and in the relationship between speaker and anticipated audience. Moreover, for Bakhtin, "the word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented to a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" ("Discourse in the Novel," in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle [Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1986], 672). In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin posits that "all rhetorical forms, monologic in their compositional structure, are oriented toward the listener and his answer. This orientation toward the listener is usually considered the basic constitutive feature of all rhetorical discourse" (672). In my dissertation, I will be working with Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical constitution of authors, texts, programs, and audiences. In this regards, it is important to note that Pertti Alasuutari, in his essay on the third (newest) generation of audience studies, states that scholars need to "bear in mind that audience is, most of all, a discursive construct produced by a particular analytic gaze" ("Introduction," in *Rethinking The Media Audience*, ed. Alasuutari [London: Sage, 1999], 6). John Tulloch, "The Implied Audience in Soap Opera Production: Everyday Rhetorical Strategies Amongst Television Professionals," in *Rethinking the Media Audience, 151-78* attempts to give shape to the kind of audience study that Alasuutari calls for. In it, he redeploys Bakhtin's dialogic theory of the constitution of messages as well as Bakhtin's theory of rhetoric in order to establish the groundwork for a study of audiences that avoids the monologic pitfalls of the ethnographic, second wave of audience studies. I offer a more detailed discussion of Bakhtin's dialogic theory of communication in the introduction's literature review.

dynamic of discovery. “I’m not that interested in ‘mass communications,’” Rogers wrote, “I am much more interested in what happens between this person and the one watching. The space between the television set and that person who’s watching is very holy ground.”<sup>39</sup> In such a dynamic, God is neither dictator nor judge.<sup>40</sup> Rogers thus envisioned his program as a possible space for giving birth to what he calls a “holy ground”<sup>41</sup> of communication — that space between any two people in which each is accepted “just the way you are.”<sup>42</sup> This is the space that is essential, Rogers asserts, and yet “invisible to the eye(s).”<sup>43</sup> Rogers pulls this quote, “invisible to the eyes,” from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince* (1943). “Here is my secret. It is very simple. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it is this kind of affective, relational sensibility that Rogers embodies in the form and content of *MRN*. This directional spirit that animates the show. Put in different language, that which is invisible is the disposition of the soul.

Thus, we can see that through his search for healing, Rogers discovered that for him, the healing process is not just a question of speaking about one’s wounds, but is a process that includes an understanding of the divine as caretaker. In his book, *The Wounded Healer* (1972), Catholic priest and psychologist Henri Nouwen suggests that ministers make their own emotional wounds known as a source of healing for those under their care, thus proposing a necessary mutuality of “I and thou.” Nouwen writes that

---

<sup>39</sup> Fred Rogers Company Website, “About Us,” accessed 1 July, 2013, <http://www.fci.org/FRC/about-us.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Rogers’ theology emphasizes the message of Christ as a reformer who brings forth a God that cares for his creation and who is accessible and in touch with mankind.

<sup>41</sup> “Children’s Media,” Fred Rogers Company website, <http://www.fredrogers.org/media/>.

<sup>42</sup> Rogers ritually told his viewers, “There is no person in the whole world like you. And I like you just the way you are.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Richard Howard (New York Harcourt, 2000), 64.

Jesus made his own broken body the way to health, to liberation, and new life. Thus like Jesus, he who proclaims liberation is called not only to care for his own wounds and the wounds of others, but also to make his wounds into a major source of his healing power.... Words like ‘alienation,’ ‘separation,’ ‘isolation,’ and ‘loneliness’ have been used as the names of our wounded condition. Maybe the word ‘loneliness’ best expresses our immediate experience and therefore most fittingly enables us to understand our brokenness.

Indeed, Rogers’ most memorable psychological and spiritual wounds from his childhood come from acts of alienation and isolation resulting from bullying, which in itself is an expression of alienation and shame. Consequently, his program and life project is concerned with providing everyday acts of healing to those who experience this fundamental wounding of the human spirit. “It may seem strange,” he noted in a speech he delivered at Saint Vincent College, “but the more I live, the more I find myself feeling gratitude for the tough times I’ve been through – not that I would have asked for them – but they turned out to be times in which God’s presence was so clear – so real that it felt like Mrs. Stewart [the neighbor who welcomed him in when he was being teased by bullies] opening her door and taking me into her safe home.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, the instrument he uses to minister to those experiencing the great wound of alienation is his own wounded person—his body, articulating a message of acceptance and inclusion in an everyday ritual of television performance.<sup>46</sup>

A deeper look into this idea of the “wounded healer” in Rogers’ aesthetics reveals its foundational importance. Rogers’ narrative details how he only found relief from the bullying by acknowledging his hurt and by expressing the emotions that result from the

---

<sup>45</sup> Rogers, “More Than We Know,” Principal Address at the Opening Ceremonies of the Sesquicentennial of Saint Vincent, Saint Vincent Archabbey Basilica, Latrobe, PA, 25 April, 1995, Fred Rogers Archive, “Spirituality Files,” Speech Box 1.

<sup>46</sup> See *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, s.v. “Wounded Healer,” by Bonnie Smith Crusalis, 2010.

wounding through the playing of the piano. In this sense, his emotional processing of the pain that resulted from the bullying is transformative and healing. The acceptance of the wound, in combination with the emotional expression of piano playing, also reveals a creative space that allows Rogers to grow beyond the wound. Instead of becoming an aggressive individual, scarred by shame, an individual who retaliates against those who bullied him, he becomes the “wounded healer,” transforming his pain into a form of *caritas* in imitation of Christ. His primary interest thus becomes one of providing care for others who are experiencing difficulty and/or pain through an aesthetic, artistic practice that focuses on creative transformation and social emotional bonds.<sup>47</sup>

For Rogers, the appropriate response to abuse is not revenge, but the transformative calling of expressing and employing *caritas*. In a 1994 interview with *The Christian Century*, Rogers told reporter Lisa Belcher-Hamilton that his beloved seminary Professor William F. Orr introduced him to a conviction that he came to embrace. Rogers describes Orr’s conviction saying, “evil is the accuser and Christ is the advocate. Evil wants us to look at ourselves and others with accusing eyes and hearts, while Christ encourages us to look at ourselves and others with the eyes and hearts of love.”<sup>48</sup> In his “Invisible Essentials” speech, Rogers notes that while Dr. Orr rarely spoke about evil, the few times he did hear him discuss the matter he was very clear about the way it operated in regards to intrapersonal emotions and human behavior. According to Rogers, Orr told

---

<sup>47</sup> For an interesting exploration of the concept of *caritas* from a critical theory perspective, see Romand Coles, *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> Lisa Belcher-Hamilton, “The Gospel According to Fred: A Visit with Mr. Rogers,” *Christian Century* 111.12 (13 April, 1994): 382.



him that “Evil will do anything to make you feel as bad as you possibly can about yourself.”

Because if you feel the worst about who you are, you will undoubtedly look with evil eyes on your neighbor and you will get to believe the worst about him or her. Accuse yourself. Accuse your neighbor. Get your neighbor to accuse somebody else, and the evil thrives and spreads.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, Rogers juxtaposes Orr’s description of Evil with that of Christ, “the Advocate.

While on the other side – way on the other side of evil – is Jesus the Christ who is our Advocate. He will do anything to encourage us to know that God’s creation is good, that we, His brothers and Sisters, can look on each other as having real value. Our advocate will do anything to remind us that we are lovable and that our neighbor is lovable too!!

These antithetical figures and the behavioral choices that characterize their respective interactions with others illustrate well Rogers’ philosophy for acting in the world in imitation of Christ.

Critically, and in ways that relate to Rogers’ bullying experience, Orr describes these two oppositional forces in the Christian religion in regards to the emotion of shame, one of the most common responses to bullying. In Orr’s assessment, evil brings about a feeling of shame for the individual by encouraging the individual to feel “the worst about who you are.” In contrast, Orr describes Christ as an advocate, who protects the individual from the destructive emotion of shame, encouraging persons to look upon themselves and others as having value and being lovable. This focus on the psyche of the human person and the power of rhetoric to affect one’s emotional life, further point to Rogers’ interest in assisting children in learning to manage their feelings. “You made this

---

<sup>49</sup> Rogers, “Invisible Essentials,” 5-6.

day a special day by just your being you,” he repeatedly told his viewers on each episode of the *Neighborhood*.

As exemplified in an excerpt from the Prayer of St. Francis, Christ instructs his followers to consistently—even if served a profound offense—respond to others with love.

*Lord make me an instrument of your peace  
Where there is hatred let me sow love  
Where there is injury, pardon  
Where there is doubt, faith...*

Francis’ prayer is not far from Rogers’ own – a prayer he says everyday before entering the studio: “Dear God, let some word that is heard be yours.”<sup>50</sup> Rogers deploys this message on each program, be it in the part where he appears in the persona of Mister Rogers or in the dramas that ensue in the “Neighborhood of Make Believe.” It is a conviction that he upholds in every episode and one that is fundamentally concerned with the performance of child advocate. This stance exists in direct communication with either self in other. As such, it requires a vision of one’s own behavior as directly impacting someone, whether that is one’s own self or another person. Both require a stance of mutual recognition infused with compassion. Both view the individual subject as ever and always involved in social relations, which, as Emile Durkheim has posited, defines the space of the sacred.<sup>51</sup> When identifying the furniture in his office for the *Christian Century* reporter, Rogers associated each object with an important person in his life. “The

---

<sup>50</sup> Hollingsworth, 20-21.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. See also Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2008).

way things can have meaning for me is in the ways they remind me of people I've found nourishing," he said.<sup>52</sup>

Having identified his television program as his ministry when he was awarded his M.Div in 1963, Rogers assumes the teaching, ministerial role of Christ by modeling his behavior and communicating the fundamental message of the gospel in everyday language. It is important to keep in mind that the historical Christ speaks as a teacher, not as a savior, and thus his message is more, as he would say, anthropocentric than theological.<sup>53</sup> Further, he communicates primarily with everyday people and in everyday, storytelling language; he does not make huge theological statements. Rather, he speaks about loving one's neighbor as thyself, which requires the utmost command and management over one's feelings. Rogers' teaching, like Christ, is a pedagogy of affects and ethics in which he primarily sets out to help his viewers learn how to manage their fears and anxieties. Through the integration of his specialized areas of knowledge, Christianity and child development psychology, he engages in a careful performance with the intention of providing emotional and spiritual care for those watching his program. Just as Christ reassured his followers to "be not afraid, I walk beside you," Rogers invites viewers to be his neighbor and sings:

*We are not to be afraid of anything  
Anything at all  
We're not to be afraid  
We're not to be afraid  
The king says fear nothing at all*<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Belcher-Hamilton, "The Gospel According to Fred," 382.

<sup>53</sup> Rogers, Notes dated 19 Sep., 1984, Fred Rogers Archive, Folder "Save/Inspirational/Spiritual," Box EU36.

<sup>54</sup> Rogers, "We're not to be Afraid," *The Neighborhood Archive*, accessed 30 June, 2015, [http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/were\\_not\\_to\\_be\\_afraid.html](http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/were_not_to_be_afraid.html)

Alluding to Christ through the verbal code, “the king,” Rogers reassures his viewers of Christ’s message to have no fear. The concept of neighbor singularly functions on a dual religious and secular level. It is also important to remember that it was Rogers’ childhood neighbor who offered him sanctuary and safety from the bullies out on the street.

Reciprocally, as the “wounded healer,” Rogers offers his television home as a place of refuge for *MRN* viewers. Although Rogers may not have been conscious of these choices during the early years of his program, he seems to have recognized much of it in his 1994 speech, “Invisible Essentials.”

Playing the role of the “wounded healer,” Rogers reenacts rituals of spiritual healing on each *MRN* program through the act of dialogue and expression of genuine feelings with the viewer. In a powerful way, as a kind of covert minister in the character of “Mister Rogers,” Rogers creates and enacts a fatherly, Christ-like, adult male figure, who cares for his “children,” as articulated in the Christian theological narrative. “In the light of the Gospel’s teaching, writes religion scholar Judith Gundry-Volf, “Christians are called to make a place for children in the fellowship of believers as co-participants in the gifts of salvation through Christ, and also learn from children how to participate in God’s reign.”<sup>55</sup> It is through this healing, Christ-like figure of the minister, who speaks to listeners from a place of authenticity of feeling and understanding and who bestows empathy on his interlocutors that Rogers works to endear his television audience to him by offering them a space of spiritual relief grounded in merciful connectivity.

Another story (parable) we can examine to better understand this critical positioning of mutuality and affirmation through dialogue is Rogers’ recollection of his

---

<sup>55</sup> Judith Gundry-Volf, “To such as these belongs the Rein of God’: Jesus and Children,” *Theology Today* 56.4 (2000): 469.

high school classmate, Jim Stumbaugh. Asked by interviewer Karen Herman about his high school years, Rogers notes that he was an active writer for the school newspaper and President of the Student Council. But he quickly moves from that statement of pride and accomplishment to a place of humility where he acknowledges that at first, he was neither confident nor successful as a high school underclassman. “I was very, very shy when I was in grade school and when I got to high school I was scared to death to go to school.” This all changed when a classmate of his, Stumbaugh, described by Rogers as a “big man on campus” and a star of various sports teams, was injured at a football practice.<sup>56</sup>

The injury put Stumbaugh in the hospital for several weeks and Rogers was instructed by one of his teachers to deliver Stumbaugh’s homework to him there. According to Rogers, the two began to talk and, as Rogers describes it, he began to see “what substance there was in this jock.” Reflexively, Stumbbaugh “could see what substance there was in this shy kid,” Rogers tells Herman. Later, when Stumbaugh returned to school, he praised Rogers to the other students saying, “that Rogers kid’s okay.” This act, according to Rogers, “made all the difference in the world for [him].”

Just somebody saying to the others ‘that Roger kid’s okay.’ It was after that that I started writing for the newspaper, got to be President of the Student Council. What a difference one person can make in the life of another. It’s almost as if he said, ‘I like you just the way you are.’ And for me to be able to pass that kind of acceptance on through this wonderful medium, that’s been a real blessing for me.<sup>57</sup>

In this statement, Rogers reveals the powerful meanings that the two created in their interpersonal and later group interactions. The two first discover one another through

---

<sup>56</sup> Rogers, interview by Herman.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

interpersonal dialogue and mutual recognition, and find in this interaction, acceptance, appreciation, and a sense of their common humanity. Most significantly, perhaps is the way that dialogue, in this instance, transcends difference and transforms Rogers' sense of self. A childhood acquaintance of Rogers, E. Kay Myers wrote in 2009 that "the friendship of an athlete [i.e., Stumbaugh] and a fat kid [i.e., Rogers] ended the teasing that had long plagued Fred."<sup>58</sup> The relational qualities detailed in these recollections of Stumbaugh and Rogers' dynamic exemplify well Buber's understanding of the powerful elements of a dialogical orientation and communication ethic.

In their discussion of Buber's psychotherapeutic analysis of dialogue, Mick Cooper et al. note the *thou-ifying* qualities of the dialogical relationship. Buber conceives of dialogue as a form of communication "where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them."<sup>59</sup> Thus, for Buber, the first and most basic action or movement that occurs in any given dialogical engagement is a "turning" toward the other, which includes "an attentiveness, receptivity, or responding to their Being."<sup>60</sup> Specific to Buber and critically useful in thinking about Rogers' project is the idea that essential to this basic dialogical movement is that "this turning is toward the *particular* Being of the Other—their unique and individual existence—the one that is concretely and existentially in the situation made 'of flesh and blood.'"<sup>61</sup> This identification of the other, Cooper et.al assert, is contrasted with the

---

<sup>58</sup> See E. Karen Hayes, "Remembering Fred Rogers," *The Loyallhanna Review* (2009): 1.

<sup>59</sup> Buber, quoted in Mick Cooper, Amy Chak, Flora Cornish, and Alex Gillespie, "Dialogue: Bridging Personal, Community, and Social Transformation," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53.1 (2012): 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Cooper et al., 73. See also Samuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy From Kierkegaard to Buber* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

abstract experiencing of the other as perceived in law. Thus, Buber's understanding of dialogue, experientially "requires an *I-Thou* attitude toward the other" as opposed to the other stance option in the *I-It* attitude.<sup>62</sup>

For Buber, the I-Though attitude is not only characterized by this relating to the Other in their particularity but also a 'standing alongside' the other, and an experiencing of them as a fluid, freely choosing subjectivity. In contrast, in the I-It attitude, the Other is experienced as a static determined 'thing,' something that can be broken down into parts, and surveyed, studied, or measured.<sup>63</sup>

Essential for understanding the transformative dialogical relationship between Stumbaugh and Rogers is Buber's assertion that the I-Thou attitude is characterized by a *confirmation* of the other. This confirmation is essentially an act of love.<sup>64</sup> This identification of dialogue's first position of turning towards the unique other and second position of existential confirmation contributes greatly to our understanding of Rogers' perception of the process of dialoging and befriending he experienced with Stumbaugh. Clearly, in this parable, Rogers is inscribing an understanding of the I-Thou dialectic, theorized by Buber, which has gained, of late, great acceptances in secular spheres. However, it is one from which Rogers spoke to an audience hungry for such a message of mutuality.

### **Staging Development: Erik Erikson and Fred Rogers**

During his early period at the Arsenal, Rogers was invited by Nancy Curry, a psychologist and instructor of preschool-aged children at the Arsenal, to bring the puppets he made and operated on his earlier WQED television program, *The Children's*

---

<sup>62</sup> Cooper et al., 73.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> See Cooper et al. "Dialogue: Bridging Persona, Community, and Social Transformation," 73.

*Corner*, into her classroom. In the 2014 documentary *Lessons from Mister Rogers*, Curry describes the scene between Rogers, the puppets, and the children during these visits as “magic moments.” According to Curry, Rogers had the children “mesmerized” by the puppets as they all gathered together in conversation. “He and I had eye contact,” she says, “and when something special would happen with one of the children, we would just be so excited.” Curry tells of a memorable moment when Rogers’ puppet, “King Friday,” a character on *The Children’s Corner*, who would later become a fixture on *MRN*, spoke to a little girl in the class. The little girl tells King Friday that she is about to move to a new house.

“Do you know what?” she asks Friday, “I’m going to move to a new house.”

“A new house?” Friday responds. “How wonderful! Are you going to take your toys with you?” Rogers moves Friday up just a few feet in front of her face, creating intimate space between the two.

“Yes,” the little girl responds with a smile.

“Are you going to take your mommy and daddy and brother and sister?” Friday asks.

“Yes,” she responds.

“Wonderful!” he pronounces as she casts a wide smile and stares into the puppet’s face.<sup>65</sup>

In recollecting this dialogue on camera, Curry notes that Rogers “was being empathic” with the little girl. She chuckles and says that he had a kind of “mini-therapy session with that girl.” She then notes how “happy” she was to have Rogers in her classroom and

---

<sup>65</sup> Rubin.



confesses how each week she would anticipate the day that Rogers would come for a visit. “The kids loved it; I loved it; I felt like a child myself,” she says. “I think that was....is one of the things about Fred – that he can reach to the child in you even if you are a grownup.”<sup>66</sup> This last observation reveals a very important aspect of Rogers’ dialogical communication – his ability, and intention, to communicate not only with the child but intergenerationally. As we will see in chapter four, fan letters written to Rogers demonstrate how he connected with members at every stage of the life cycle – not just the preschoolers who were the explicit target audience for his program.

At the Arsenal, Rogers was also able to attend guest lectures by world-renowned psychologist Erik Erikson, a cofounder of the Center.<sup>67</sup> Erikson placed in high regard on learning from children through direct contact and observation. “You see a child play, and it is so close to seeing an artist paint, for in play the child says things without uttering a word,” Erikson once said. “You can see how he solves his problems. You can also see what’s wrong. Young children especially have enormous creativity and whatever’s in them rises to the surface in free play.”<sup>68</sup> Erikson did not complete his doctorate because he wanted to learn solely from interaction with and observation of children. Erikson’s theories on psychosocial development were groundbreaking at the time and are still influential today.<sup>69</sup>

Erikson called his prominent theory on the life-cycle the “Eight Ages of Man.” In it, he posits the defining problematic of each of his categorical stages of psychosocial

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Erikson, 91, Psychoanalyst Who Reshaped Views of Human Growth, Dies,” *New York Times*, 13 May, 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Kimmel and Collins, “The Wonder of It All: Fred Rogers and the Story of an Icon” (Latrobe, PA: Fred Rogers Center, 2008), i.

development. For Rogers, Erikson's discussions concerning the early stages of life were likely of critical interest and we can see how he aimed to foster the healthy option as identified by Erikson in each crisis pairing of opposites, e.g. trust vs. mistrust. The first defining problematic Erikson sets up is the stage from infancy to the second year. It is defined by the pairing, basic trust vs. mistrust. This stage involves the child's most prominent feeling experienced during this period of life: "Can I trust the world?" In this phase, the relationship with the mother is most significant as the child relies on her to meet his fundamental needs of feeding, sleeping, and bowel relaxation. Here, the experience of "mutual regulation" is key to healthy development, as it helps the child to balance the discomfort he feels as a result of his "immaturity of homeostasis with which he was born."<sup>70</sup> The infant's first achievement then is to let his mother out of sight without "undue anxiety,"<sup>71</sup> trusting that she has left him in a safe situation to which she will eventually return. Erikson sees in the passage from one stage to the next a moment in which a virtue develops – in this case it is hope. We will explore the ways in which Rogers addresses attachment and mutual regulation on his program through song, drama, and object relations in chapter three. This presentation of the need to learn to cope with anxiety is an overarching objective of Rogers' program. He makes intentional and concerted efforts to serve as a trusted adult, accompanying the child during the "television visit" as the two explore the social and material world together. Rogers reviewed scripts twice a month with McFarland, who identified and analyzed how language, aesthetic, and other choices Rogers made would likely be perceived and understood from the young child's perspective.

---

<sup>70</sup> Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), 247.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Erikson set up the second stage problematic as “autonomy vs. shame and doubt” and assigns it to the ages between two and four. In this stage, the child’s leading existential question is “Is it okay to be me?” During this stage, the toddler must internalize through feeling a basic faith in his existence. “As his environment encourages him to ‘stand on his own feet,’ it must protect him against meaningless and arbitrary experiences of shame and of early doubt.”<sup>72</sup> Like the “trust vs. mistrust” phase, the “autonomy vs. shame and doubt” phase is critical for the child to develop in a healthy way (i.e. with minimal development of neurosis). Shame, Erikson writes, is a dangerous emotion as he defines it as “rage turned against the self.” The child who does not develop a sense of confidence in his abilities during this stage (by way of efficient mastery of toilet training and clothing himself, for example), will, according to Erikson, overmanipulate himself and develop obsessive, repetitive behaviors (i.e. neurosis). “He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world.”<sup>73</sup> The damaging effects of this kind of unhealthy, development seem no doubt destructive and antisocial. If the child develops in a healthy manner during this stage, he will develop the virtue of will, according to Erikson.

When Rogers sings words of encouragement and acceptance to his viewers, he appears to be tackling both of these early problematics. In each and every episode Rogers tells the viewer, “You are special” and “I like you just the way you are,” which can be taken as a response to the child’s predominant question during the first stage – “Is it okay to be me?” Below are excerpts from two songs, “I’m proud of you” (which first aired on

---

<sup>72</sup> Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 252.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-53.

Episode 1131 in 1971) and “It’s you I like” (which aired on Episode 1133 in 1971) that answer the primary question that characterizes Erikson’s second stage, “Is it okay to be me?” The second song, “It’s you I like” subtly combats feelings of shame when Rogers sings that he is not interested in the “things that hide you.”

**“I’m proud of you**

I hope that you’re as proud as I am  
I’m proud of you  
I’m proud that you are proud and that  
You’re learning how important you are  
How important each person you see can be  
Discovering each one’s specialty  
Is the most important learning  
I’m proud of you”

**“It’s you I like,**

It’s not the things you wear,  
It’s not the way you do your hair  
But it’s you I like  
The way you are right now  
The way down deep inside you  
Not the things that hide you (my emphasis)  
Not your toys, they’re just beside you

But it’s you I like  
Every part of you  
Your skin, your eyes, your feelings  
Even when you’re feeling blue  
That it’s you I like  
It’s you yourself  
It’s you  
It’s you I like.

This stage is followed by a similar one, which characterizes the preschool stage of life, ages three through five. In this stage the child’s existential question becomes, “Is it okay for me to do, move, and act?” The pairing here is “initiative vs. guilt.” This problematic adds on the development of autonomy from the previous phase in the form of quality undertaking, planning, and addressing a task for the sake of acting and moving on. The child is engaged in a process of experimentation in which she attempts to master the material world around her. During this stage, she learns to take initiative, take risks, and develop independence. Children may feel guilt when their initiative does not produce

their desired results. Rogers articulates feelings of frustration with such tasks in his song, “It’s No Use.”

**It’s no use,**  
No use trying  
‘Cause it’s no use  
No sighing  
‘Cause I can see  
That it never will be  
I hope hopelessly

It’s no use,  
No use crying  
‘Cause it’s no use  
No use denying  
It’s time that I  
Just stop trying  
Because it’s no use<sup>74</sup>

Here, he models the articulation of frustration for his preschool viewers, who by their age have developed increasing linguistic sophistication that permits them to communicate their needs and feelings more accurately than that of a toddler.<sup>75</sup> By communicating his frustration, Mister Rogers simultaneously shows empathy for his viewers and helps them to see that such frustration is something experienced by everyone. This is one of several examples that illustrate how Rogers’ artistic creation creates rhetorical ways of addressing Erikson’s stages of development by speaking to the struggles and feelings that come with each stage in a productive and processual way.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> “It’s No Use” first appeared on *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*, episode 1608 (1989).

<sup>75</sup> Douglas Davies, *Child Development: A Practitioner’s Guide* (New York, Guilford Press, 2004), 262.

<sup>76</sup> For more on Erikson’s place in the child development theory, see Daniel Burst, *Erik Erikson and the American Psyche: Ego, Ethics, and Evolution* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2006).

## **Creativity and Agape:**

### **The Palimpsest of Feeling and Thinking**

The education Rogers received through observing children at Arsenal, in discussing his observations with McFarland, and in other readings and lectures (by, for example Erik Erikson and Arsenal co-founder Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose work I will discuss later in this chapter) would provide him with the foundational perspectives for understanding and communicating with young children and the larger family unit on his television program. In a 1969 address he gave at Thiel College entitled “Encouraging Creativity,” Rogers points to Erikson’s writings on the ways that youth develop strength and confidence in their own talents and creativity. According to Erikson, Rogers states,

In youth, strength emerges from the sense that society recognizes the young individual as a bearer of fresh energy and that the individual so confirmed recognizes society as a living process, which inspires loyalty as it receives it [and] honors confidence as it demands it.<sup>77</sup>

From Erikson’s assessment, Rogers posits his own thesis – that education must have as its primary goal the *helping* of students develop greater awareness of “their own unique selves” such that they “increase their feelings of personal worth, responsibility, and freedom.”<sup>78</sup> Here we see the explicit identification of a certain kind of mutuality in relationship, which serves as the launching point of the self, as he/she exists within a world of others. Rogers applies this fundamental interplay between self and society/other to the language and philosophy of education, suggesting a radical change in the way we

---

<sup>77</sup> Rogers, “Encouraging Creativity,” Fred Rogers Archive, Box EU3, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

understand the role of teacher and the institution of school, as well as the parent as the first teacher.<sup>79</sup>

Prior to this assertion, Rogers deliberates on the standard methods for and discursive consensus on improving instruction and curricula in American schools. He begins with the premise that every child comes into the world with a “unique endowment” that grants him the chance to create something “entirely different from everybody else in the world.”<sup>80</sup> From this starting point, he asks his audience what happens to children who hear that their creations, e.g. a mud pie, is not good or that their block building, for example, holds no importance or worth? “What do you think happens to that something from inside—that SELF which was trying itself on the world for size?” he writes. In reply to his own questions, he states that as a result of this “degradation,” and if constant in its articulation, the child is likely to feel unaccepted and may carry such feelings with him as he grows into adulthood. Noting to his audience that most of them are likely appalled by the notion that any adult would degrade a child’s creation in such blatant and cruel fashion, Rogers points to the ways that such communication is employed in both implicit and explicit ways in the culture. “What about people who have developed the machines for teaching human children which when a child presses the button for a wrong answer the machine gives off an unpleasant response?” he asks. “Children, like laboratory rats, can learn quickly not to experiment with wrong answers.”<sup>81</sup> Although Rogers’ critique is now commonplace, it was novel at the time. His

---

<sup>79</sup> Note that the Modern School Movement of the early twentieth century advocated many of these changes, which, considering the standard practices in the public schools that Rogers identifies in the 1960s, are still at the time considered radical.

<sup>80</sup> Rogers, “Encouraging Creativity,” 1.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

reverence for the importance of making mistakes as part and parcel of the learning process is most notable in his speech as he advocates for compassion in a way that addresses the pragmatic concerns that undergird and drive the systems of measurement and achievement developed by those who work for educational interests. This is not to be confused, however, with a communication process that demeans the child. The question is how to communicate to the child that the building he built with blocks is not designed to hold weight in language that still upholds the worth of the child's endeavor. This is a tricky balance to achieve and Rogers has been accused of being a precursor of the contradictory philosophy in which everyone is above average.

Rogers decries the postwar educational approach in which children are treated as future cogs in a machine. He argues that this kind of educational approach undercuts one of the most fundamental aspects of a child's basic humanity – the ability to produce new creations and insights. This has become common practice in American schools, where the arts and humanities are institutionally devalued in favor of a curricula that demands only right or wrong answers and thus squelches creativity and critical thinking. He notes how more and more, the practices of educators focus on methods and techniques that seek to shape students to fit a particular type of rigid subjectivity assessed by IQ tests and multiple-choice exams for “computerized industry potential.” Activities that constitute early leaning environments, such as “block building, “home-making” and drama, are labeled “EXTRA curricular” in schools beyond the pre-school level.

It's as if we, the educators, were saying to the developing person ‘From now on, young people, the way we tell you to do something is the way you must do it or you won't pass,’ – and, by the time those children hear 11 or 12 years of that, is it any wonder that they have trouble knowing who they are?



Here we see that Rogers' pedagogical aims stretch far beyond his immediate interests in the very young child. Indeed, in a statement he made to a Congressional Committee dealing with the issue of whether to fund educational television, he notes how, in the long run, his program will perform "a great service for mental health."<sup>82</sup> He thus views his project as part of larger societal issues on how best to nurture human creativity at both the personal and institutional levels in order to produce emotionally and spiritually healthy subjects. In fact, in this same speech, he blames the kind of rigid programming of individuals practiced at schools for the rebellion of adolescents and young adults emerging in the 1960s counterculture. "Our young people are weary of being programmed and pigeon-holed," he states, "and, those whose creativity has not been encouraged are rebelling."<sup>83</sup> In imagining young people as an appendix of the computer, Rogers is prescient as he gives us a glimpse of today's working situation.

In many ways, Rogers' critique of education is informed by John Dewey's Progressive Education reform movement. Dewey, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, finds the traditional American schooling system limiting in its rote learning model, perhaps best described by Freire some fifty years later (and in reference to Brazil) as the "banking model of education." Dewey's pragmatic approach focuses on the problem of how we think. For Dewey, all thinking is situated in a problematic solution, "and is brought to a conclusion within a context that shapes the thinking and determines the relevance, and, indeed the truth of the conclusion."<sup>84</sup> Thus, for Dewey, knowledge is what we seek in attempting to resolve a problem, and truth is the answer

---

<sup>82</sup> Rogers, "Senate Statement on PBS Funding," 1 May, 1969, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fredrogerssenatetestimonypbs.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> Rogers, "Encouraging Creativity," 2.

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence A. Kimpton, "Dewey and Progressive Education," *The School Review* 67.2 (1958): 125.

that “satisfactorily solves the problem.” Such a trajectory emphasizes the contextual complexities involved in any given human endeavor and thus highlights, as Rogers does in his speech, the need for an educational practice that places value on human creativity. In addition to this fundamental and novel idea, Dewey developed in his later writings the concept of value in human life, which he identifies as *growth*. The point of living, for Dewey, is growth, which implicitly means that if we are to continue living over time, we must encounter problems “if we are to realize the full richness of life.”<sup>85</sup> Neither Dewey nor Rogers are interested in bringing up children who do not encounter problems as a measure of their happiness.’ Quite to the contrary, they both understand that encountering problems is inevitable and learning to solve them is indispensable.

Indeed, growth as an increased ability to resolve problems, is one of the major themes on *MRN* and though he does not discuss it explicitly in “Encouraging Creativity,” he alludes to it throughout his speech in the ways he calls for the continuous development of human expression through the encouragement of each person’s inherent human value.

Our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is—that each of us has something which no one else has—or ever will have—something inside which is unique to all time. It’s our job to encourage each other to discover that uniqueness, and to provide ways of developing its expression.<sup>86</sup>

While embracing these primary philosophies of Dewey, Rogers adds another critical element to his pedagogy that is singular to his program, and arguably the most compelling aspect of *MRN*. In his speech, Rogers argues that compassion, and respectful and affirming recognition of the other, are essential components in the process of nurturing creativity and growth, which he defines as the primary goal of education.

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Rogers, “Encouraging Creativity,” 2.

According to Lawrence Kimpton, writing in 1959, ten years before Rogers gave his “Encouraging Creativity” speech, Dewey’s essential philosophical principles are as follows: “that the learning process occurs within the context of concern and challenge, and life takes on values as long as this continues as an active process.”<sup>87</sup> As discussed, Rogers educational approach follows much of Dewey’s Progressive educational philosophy, but it also expands and reworks Dewey’s principles through an incorporation of the concept of love, which, he posits in “Encouraging Creativity,” is a critical component of education. “We also need to help people to discover the true meaning of love,” he asserts towards the close of his speech. “Love is generally confused with dependence,” he declares.

Those of us who have grown in true love know that we can love only in proportion to our capacity for independence. We must be able to be ourselves in the face of love for our love to have meaning. Only by understanding our own uniqueness can we fully appreciate how special our neighbor really is. Only by being aware of our own endowments can we begin to marvel at the variety which our Creator has provided in men.<sup>88</sup>

To better understand Rogers’ understanding of love and how it differs from today’s culturally dominant understandings, let us turn to Stein M. Wivestad, who attempts to clarify the differences between Aristotle’s conception of love and the Christian concept of agape in his article, “The Educational Challenges of *Agape* and *Phronesis*.” Here, Wivestad examines Thomas Aquinas’ integration of Aristotle’s *phronesis* (moral wisdom, practical judgment or prudence) and the basic concept of *agape* in the Christian tradition in Thomas’ extensive, *Summa Theologiae*. Wivestad argues that Thomas’ combination of these concepts offers productive resources for our contemporary

---

<sup>87</sup> Kimpton, 126.

<sup>88</sup> Rogers, “Encouraging Creativity,” 3.

educational system, asserting in the first line of his abstract that “children as learners need adults who love them, even when the children are unable to give anything in return. Furthermore, adults should be able to make wise judgments concerning what is good for the children.”<sup>89</sup> It is this understanding of Christian *agape*, which refers to unconditional love that Rogers ritually prioritizes in each of his “television visits.” As we will see, in the Christian tradition, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas, it is unconditional love, or *agape*, that “directs the acts of all the other virtues to our final end.”<sup>90</sup>

Wivestad notes that while there are similarities in moral wisdom between biblical and Aristotelian traditions, each have large differences in regards to their respective conceptions of the human being, which are connected primarily to each tradition’s religious convictions. In Aristotelian tradition, “God—the Prime Mover—is distant from human affairs.”<sup>91</sup> Those things that are not eternal (i.e., mortal) are not governed by God’s divine providence; thus, human prudence (*phronesis*) is a necessary substitute. In contrast, the biblical tradition posits that human beings are created in the image of God, indeed the nearest to Him out of all of his creatures. Humans, in the biblical tradition are created with “unique” tasks and talents, thus making them “God’s stewards—responsible towards God both in theoretical and practical affairs.” In this matrix, God is considered both ineffable (above all understanding)<sup>92</sup> and immanent (as close as a member of the family). He actively intervenes in human history, as demonstrated by Jesus in the Gospels. According to the Gospel of John and the writings of Paul, Jesus *embodies* God’s

---

<sup>89</sup> Stein M. Wivestad, “The Educational Challenges of *Agape* and *Phronesis*,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42.2 (2008): 307-24.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>92</sup> For more on this perspective see Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Ineffability: The Failure of Words in Philosophy and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

love, called *agape*, which is a love that “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:5). This kind of love is demonstrated in Jesus’ most important and defining act of giving up his life for humanity.<sup>93</sup> Thus, for Christians, eternal power and glory is found in a love that is defined by acts of service and self-sacrifice for the other. In contrast, Aristotelian virtue tradition espouses the importance of a person becoming strong or virile.

Further, Wivestad points out that in Latin, *virtus* is related to *vir*, a male person, and writes that for Aristotle, “happiness comes from realizing manly moral and intellectual virtues.”<sup>94</sup> The Christian tradition, rather, holds human resources in a secondary position and places the highest value not on becoming strong, but on serving others.<sup>95</sup> “Biblical Christianity....does not focus on the climbing towards perfection and mastery, but on being in a good relation with the only perfect example, Christ, like branches in the vine (John 15:5).” This last point speaks directly to Rogers’ primary points in “Encouraging Creativity,” as it dovetails with Rogers’ critique of American education in neglecting to foster the unique creativity of every human being as granted by God.<sup>96</sup> As stated earlier, Christian theology asserts that the human being, created in the likeness of God, has been born with unique attributes and talents to employ in the service of God, and flowing from that love, in the service of others.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas attempts to integrate Aristotelian philosophy with biblical theology in an effort to discern how we ought to live. His main questions are, as articulated by Wivestad, ‘what are the characteristics of the good life?’ and ‘what

---

<sup>93</sup> See 1 John 3:16, Revised Standard Version.

<sup>94</sup> Wivestad, 312.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> While it may be pointed out that early twentieth century anarchist educators such as Abraham Maslow articulated similar philosophies of learning, it is nevertheless a fact that Rogers ties his understanding of interpersonal relations and thus creativity to his Christian understanding of personhood.

is conducive to the good life?’ According to Aristotle, the good life is attained when we realize our natural abilities and it requires that “co-operation between our ability to strive for the attainment of the good, and our reasoning ability to judge what is good.”<sup>97</sup> Further, virtue, for Aristotle, demands this kind of balanced cooperation between desire and reasoned thought. The final missing component for the attainment of the good life is *phronesis* (wisdom, intelligence, prudence), which “directs our actions towards ‘the common end of all human life’...— the good both for ourselves and our community.”<sup>98</sup> Thomas, Wivestad writes, follows Aristotle up until this point, when he begins to search for reasons that account for why humans seek a kind of happiness that transcends that which a life directed by *phronesis* offers. Indeed, even Aristotle appears to long for a type of fuller or complete happiness which he thinks is enjoyed by the contemplative Gods. Thomas transforms Aristotle’s conclusion by utilizing the Christian context to produce another way.

This way posits the ultimate end and achievement for the human person “in knowing and loving God” and locates *agape* in our human will alongside the other moral virtues. Yet while “reason is the rule for the ordinary virtues, *caritas* ‘goes beyond reason’” as it exists beyond the resource of nature.<sup>99</sup> We tend to “naturally” love those good things we see, but in order to love God above everything else, it is imperative to “infuse” *caritas* “into our hearts” so that “all virtues are guided by unconditional love.” When this occurs, even *phronesis* “is seen as ‘caused by an activity of God within us.’”<sup>100</sup> This understanding of the concepts of *agape* and *phronesis*, Wivestad tells us, is

---

<sup>97</sup> Wivestad, 314.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, T. McDermott, trans.

grounded in a Christian worldview in which God is the center of the universe and all events that occur within it. In this world, the basic criterion for judgment for any action asks the question: “does it unite me with God or not? All other criteria come in addition.”<sup>101</sup> This discussion of agape and caritas is expressed in Rogers’ prayer, “Dear God, let some word that is heard be yours.”<sup>102</sup>

Thus, it is this *caritas*, this unconditional love that “directs the acts of all other virtues to our final end.” *Caritas* supports and nourishes all the other virtues and is described by Thomas as “the mother of the other virtues.”<sup>103</sup>

A person filled with unconditional love habitually directs his whole heart to God, so that he neither thinks nor wills anything contrary to and incompatible with divine love...Directed towards the final end, ultimate happiness—all the moral virtues integrated by phronesis on a lower level, are further integrated by agape into a consistent ordered unity. Here unconditional love is seen as the main condition for a good life.<sup>104</sup>

This order stands in contrast to that philosophized by Aristotle, in which love is based on human virtue. In Christianity, love is based on the divine goodness. Aristotle’s schematic can be further clarified with his understanding of friendship as a “preferential and reciprocal love.”<sup>105</sup> Though he clearly rejects a notion of friendship that centers on profitability or pleasure, Aristotle’s idea of friendship consists of mutual appreciation in which each “loves the lovable” in one another. In contrast, *caritas* as articulated by Thomas “is not based principally on human virtue, but on divine goodness.” Since God loves even those who are not lovable, Christians are called to do the same.<sup>106</sup> Thomas

---

(Allen, TX, Christian Classics, 1989).

<sup>101</sup> Wivestad, 315.

<sup>102</sup> Hollingsworth, 21.

<sup>103</sup> Aquinas, quoted in Wivestad, 315.

<sup>104</sup> Wivestad, 315.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>106</sup> This is why Rogers reassures his viewer, in every program, that she is loved by him, “just the way you are.” This message is clearly understood by viewers, as evidenced by the hundreds of letters he received

further expands the notion of friendship to include all those connected to the friend – ‘when a man has a friendship for a certain person, for his sake he loves all belonging to him, be they children, servants, or connected with him in any way.’<sup>107</sup> This critical move by Thomas as it posits that friendship with God (*amicitia caritas*) extends to both ‘enemies’ and ‘sinners’... – those who we might not necessarily choose to be our friends but who are loved by God. ‘God is the principle object of charity (*agape*), while our neighbor is loved out of charity for God’s sake.’<sup>108</sup> “If you love God, you should also love yourself, love your own body, and love those who live close to you—even the troublesome ones—with the same love as God has for all.”<sup>109</sup> This sense of love is the same as the Benedictine and Franciscan teachings concerning the presence of God everywhere.<sup>110</sup>

Here, *agape* is not a feeling, but rather something that one does. It is interesting to think about Rogers’ use of the term “neighbor” in his opening, ritual song “Won’t you Be My Neighbor?” in the context of this Christian matrix of understanding. True, the term “friend” and the concept of “friendship” is much more common in the American cultural, linguistic context of the 1950s and 60s than “neighbor.” However, this may have more to do with the concept of a physical (proxemic) “neighborhood” which Rogers employs as the communal setting for the program. Still, he may be playing with this term in a polysemic way, both addressing his viewers as “neighbors” who live physically within his television “neighborhood,” as “neighbor” is commonly understood in American

---

from the mentally and physically disabled and from those persons and organizations dedicated to helping the disabled.

<sup>107</sup> Wivestad, 316.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> See Hollingsworth, 79.



common parlance and as “neighbors” in the Christian sense, in which “God is the principal object of charity (*agape*)” and “our neighbor is loved out of charity for God’s sake.”<sup>111</sup> According to Thomas, “the fruits of *agapan* love are inner and outer harmony – joy, peace, compassion, kindness, caring for others and, interestingly, education of others.”<sup>112</sup> In this regard, Rogers’ project would seem to fit quite well with Thomas’ conception of *agape*.

Rogers’ religious and especially ethical understandings of the human person, virtue, and the common good constitute his core value matrix and thus serve as a foundational lens from which he views and approaches the gamut of societal and cultural concerns. One essential position from which Rogers appears to operate involves the Christian understanding of the human person, perhaps expressed most clearly by a historian from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (Rogers’ alma mater), Donald K. McKim, who recently documented the history of the seminary.<sup>113</sup> McKim reviews the message of former PTS president William H. Kadel, who strived to create an open community culture through a practice of dialoguing and exchange. McKim paraphrases one of Kadel’s theological points in a document outlining his call for a more open process of dialoging. “Since all persons have been created in the image of God, ‘each has much to offer.’ When each person is taken seriously and given the opportunity to apply human skills to the decision-making process, the community is enriched.”<sup>114</sup> It is also

---

<sup>111</sup> Wivestad, 316.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> See Donald K. Kim, *Ever a Vision: A Brief History of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: 1959-2009* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

<sup>114</sup> Kim, 86.

from this position that Rogers grounds his critique of the American school system and contemporary academic values for children's education in "Encouraging Creativity."

Let us return now to "Encouraging Creativity" for further textual analysis. Rogers begins this speech with the identification of the unique creativity of the human person as inscribed from birth and thus essential. In doing so, he posits creativity as fundamental to the human person and gives it moral weight by ascribing goodness to it. In doing this, he lays the groundwork for advocating for the protection and fostering of creativity in the human person. This is the duty of the parent/adult educator, he says, to call children and adults into relation with one another, into a relationship of, as Martin Buber would put it, "I and Thou." In this relation, the act of protection and fostering comes in the form of the dialogic. The child creates something and shows it to the adult. The adult, Rogers says, must respond by validating the worth of the child's creation through language, in conversation. In this sense, Rogers personalizes Erikson's theory, which asserts that "society" grants youth strength and a sense of self-worth, by detailing which persons—parents and teachers—are largely responsible for such protection and fostering. Rogers' language brings Erikson's societal and theoretical language into the reality of everyday life in American society at large.

As he moves outside his concise critique of the American school system in an effort to connect creative learning to the larger world, Rogers tells the story of the American pianist, Van Cliburn, who made several appearances on *MRN*. In 1962, Van Cliburn traveled to Russia for a Tchaikovsky competition in which the Russian Ministry of Culture had admitted thirty-two American musicians to participate.<sup>115</sup> The competition

---

<sup>115</sup> See "AMERICANS TO VIE IN MUSIC CONTEST: Will Face Russia's Best in 2d Tchaikovsky Event," *New York Times*, 14 Mar., 1962.

was broadcast via television throughout the world. Van Cliburn apparently told Rogers how, after each session, people would await their favorite performers outside the venue, on the streets, in order to embrace them and tell them how meaningful the performances were to them. Rogers recollects reports that Russian pilots announced the final scores of the competition on their flights on the day the results were publicized. In this cold war atmosphere Rogers is prompted to argue that if more creativity was encouraged, perhaps less war would seem always imminent.

Isn't it possible that we in America have underestimated the role of the creative artist in international affairs? Isn't it possible that we might do well to encourage people to develop from within—and help them to feel confident of the worth of communicating their inner selves to the world of others rather than insisting that a person's worth is to be measured only in how many right answers he can recite?

Moreover, he states, there are no right answers around a place such as the Paris Peace table. What matters in that setting, he says, are solutions to problems. Such examples point to the ways in which creativity functions in human life in a range of highly important arenas, e.g. diplomacy.

This leads to the closing of his speech, where Rogers links the earlier ideas in his speech on the role of education in the lives of youth to a concept left out of discussions on education and society – love. In conclusion, Rogers ties the act of encouraging creativity as essentially an act of love. Like encouraging creativity, love it is the act of bestowing worth on the other, which can only take place, he argues, when an individual receives love from another. Love is thus an endless, dialogical process of giving and receiving genuine appreciation, in which one experiences “the joy and dignity of being truly human.”<sup>116</sup> Love can even serve as a platform for the lessons of international

---

<sup>116</sup> Rogers, “Encouraging Creativity,” 3.

hostilities of the Cold War. It is, in essence, *a priori*, to all other essentials for learning and creativity.<sup>117</sup>

### **Parasocial Interactivity and The Birth of “Mister Rogers”**

In 1961, Rogers was contacted by Fred Rainsberry, the director of children’s programming at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). According to Rogers, Rainsberry said something like, “Fred, I’d like you to come up here and do a fifteen minute program for children. Would you do it? I’ve seen you talk with kids, Fred. I want you to translate that to television.”<sup>118</sup> Rogers agreed to the project and recollects the CBC experience as the first time he looked directly in the camera and said “I’m glad to be with you.” It was at the CBC that he developed the program *Misterogers*, which would later, for a U.S. audience, become *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. Nancy Curry recollects her reaction to watching Rogers for the first time speak to the camera during a taping of *Misterogers*. “When they trained the camera on him,” she says, “he began to glow. It was just hard to explain but he had that kind of presence in front of the camera that brought it out in him and then it was like he was talking to each child individually.”

---

<sup>117</sup> Rogers’ critique of the American school curriculum and its exclusion of the creative arts involve an identification of what Henry Giroux and other educational scholars such as Paul Willis have identified as an educational system interested in the atomization of subjects. Giroux, whose primary critiques of our contemporary neoliberal period of American life concentrate on the fundamental opposing practices of advanced capitalism in relation to those of democracy, has emphasized Willis’ assertion that “capitalist production and its roles require certain educational outcomes” (“Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education,” *The Giroux Reader* [Boulder: Paradigm, 2006], 3). In “Encouraging Creativity,” Rogers implicitly asks, ‘what kind of human subjectivity are educational practices like this fostering?’ (2). Though once again operating in a rhetorical schema in which he is the subject speaking to a group of people, Rogers employs a Socratic, dialogical communication strategy in which he calls his viewers to adopt a critical stance to matters of community affairs that concern their well-being. His critique of school curricula extends the less overtly political messages on his program, which through specific rituals, practices, and discourses stress values of community, the unique worth of the individual, creativity, and relationships.

<sup>118</sup> As recollected by Rogers, in Rubin, *Lessons from Mister Rogers*.

Rogers credits his adaptation of this interpersonal communication style to actor Gabby Hayes, who hosted a western series called *The Gabby Hayes Show* on NBC from 1950 to 1954. Rogers often floor-managed this show when working in television, in a variety of different production roles, after graduating from Rollins College. In *Lessons from Mister Rogers*, he recollects asking Hayes, in between shots, “Mr. Hayes, what do you think of when you look into the camera and you know there are so many people watching you?” According to Rogers, Hayes responded, “Freddy, I just think of one little buckaroo.” To Rogers, this was “superb advice for anybody who would ever be thinking of television. It’s a very, very personal medium.”<sup>119</sup>

From the perspective of Horton and Wohl, this kind of direct address employed by Rogers’ character on the show defines the program’s genre as a “personality program.” Horton and Wohl contrast the “personality program” to the “drama” asserting that it is “especially designed to provide occasion for good-natured joking and teasing, praising and admiring, gossiping and telling anecdotes, in which the values of friendship and intimacy are stressed.”<sup>120</sup> Excluding acts of teasing and gossiping, Rogers’ televisual performances on *MRN* fundamentally include all of the social-communicative elements of Horton and Wohl’s “personality program.” Within this media matrix of direct “sociability,” Horton and Wohl note that typical of the “personality program” is a sense that those being interviewed by the host, as is not the case in *MRN*, are treated as “persons of consequence.”<sup>121</sup> For example, they note that in interviews hosts undergo with “non-professional contestants,” such subjects are often praised for having children or

---

<sup>119</sup> Rubin, *Lessons from Mister Rogers*.

<sup>120</sup> Horton and Wohl, 223.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

for their “youthful appearance.” However, this treatment of ordinary persons is, in a sense, redirected on Rogers’ program in a most meaningful and dynamic way. On *MRN*, the viewer, whose representation on the actual screen is visually non-existent, is treated by Rogers as a “person of consequence.” Horton and Wohl argue that on “personality programs” in which hosts interact with everyday persons on the show itself leave viewers with a sense that if they so wished, they too “could appropriately take part”<sup>122</sup> in the kind of social solidarity that these programs espouse through their, albeit brief, inclusion of “ordinary” people. In contrast Rogers, through a technique of direct “sociability” with the viewer, effectively eliminates the step for viewers in which they are prompted to imagine that they “could appropriately take part” in social solidarity with him. Instead, his primary and ultimate concern in every, single episode, is the undeviating attention and connection with the viewer himself.

In an early documented consultation conversation between McFarland and Rogers, in which the two are video-recorded sitting at a desk, McFarland tells Rogers that “the real difference between [Rogers’] program and most television for children is that it is less a *show* for children and more *real communication* with them.”<sup>123</sup> She recounts to him how, when Rogers does live meeting events with the viewers of his program, the children run up to Rogers, throw their arms around his legs, and call him “my Mister Rogers” in anticipation that Rogers will recognize them as they recognize him. “To the child,” McFarland tells Rogers, “the television program between you and the child is a real relationship and that you are speaking to the child.”<sup>124</sup> She tells him that her former

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

secretary has told her that her child gets up from his seat and speaks back to the character of “Mister Rogers” when she watches him on the television screen. What McFarland calls “real communication” with the child/viewer, Horton and Wohl identify as the phenomenon of the parasocial effect.

This interaction between McFarland and Rogers reveals much about the significance of their working relationship and McFarland’s involvement with the development and maintenance of the program. McFarland acts as an analytical agent, offering a child development reading of the program. In this regard, she translated her everyday psychoanalytical practice from the Arsenal laboratory with Rogers, the graduate student, to Rogers, the television producer. In much the same way she would watch Rogers interact with children at the Center and then meet with him afterwards to offer her observations and insights, she would read a script or watch an episode of *MRN* and then provide critical feedback with Rogers one-on-one. According to Rogers, the two met for script-draft analysis and other program-related consultation once a week. The two discussed the techniques, messaging, and other pedagogical phenomena that Rogers intended to produce or already produced, including children’s reactions to *MRN*. Unfortunately most of these recorded sessions between McFarland and Rogers are currently unavailable to the public.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> In March 2015, the Fred Rogers Center announced that Hedda Sharapan, a former producer on *MRN*, would begin to work on a special initiative “to analyze audio recordings of conversations between Fred Rogers and the late Dr. Margaret McFarland.” According to the news release, “Sharapan will evaluate a number of episodes of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* and reverse engineer them back to the original recorded conversations to illustrate how complex early childhood theory evolved into deep and thoughtful programming for young children” (“Fred Rogers Center Names Sharapan PNC Grow Up Great Senior Fellow,” press release, 19 March, 2015, <http://www.fredrogerscenter.org/2015/03/19/fred-rogers-center-names-sharapan-pnc-grow-up-great-senior-fellow/>).

## Public Pedagogy and the *MRN* Intervention

McFarland places significant emphasis in her (presumed) grant letter<sup>126</sup> on the identification of the family as the primary educational agent in society, and on television as a media technology whose discursive power is designed to function within the family communication system. It is useful to think about her and Rogers' assessment of television as an educational force operating within the family communication culture from the perspective of Henry Giroux's concept of public pedagogy. Giroux, who primarily situates his theory and praxis within the contemporary context of neoliberalism, is concerned with the maintenance and future of democratic praxis and production in a cultural environment that is evermore dominated by large corporations through media ownership and discursive production.

Writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Giroux begins his 2010 book, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, with the assertion that the new media technologies have become the "primary sites at which education takes place for the vast majority of young people and adults."<sup>127</sup> The picture he paints is the culmination of Rogers' prescient warning in "Children's TV: What The Church Can Do About It." Giroux writes, "As an integral part of a multinational apparatus that transmits dominant forms of public pedagogy, mass-produced images fill our daily lives and condition our most intimate perceptions and desires."<sup>128</sup> Giroux notes the ways in which psychologists have, since television's early days, participated as researchers and

---

<sup>126</sup> The structure and tone of this letter indicate, as analyzed by both Fred Rogers Center archivist Emily Uhrin and myself, that it was likely a grant letter seeking funding for *MRN*.

<sup>127</sup> Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



consultants for children's programming. Giroux's data shows that by far, the collaboration of psychologists with television show creators is not innocent or neutral, nor does it keep the child's welfare in mind.

In regards to the dominant corporate-owned media and the production of children's television, Giroux asserts that these corporations "stop at nothing to discover the buying habits of kids and ways through which kids can influence parental spending." Many of the strategies for attracting children to media and thus products, such as constructing "emotional hooks," are provided to producers by such psychologist consultants. For example, Giroux tells us that Kelly Pena, who is known in the children's television industry as the "Kid Whisperer," performs her research of how to appeal to children by "looking in kids' closets, going shopping with boys, and paying them \$75 for an interview (without identifying Disney as the entity collecting the data)."<sup>129</sup> From the evidence he presents, it appears clear that the only interest such media companies have in understanding children is driven by the ultimate goal of increasing corporate profits.

In the collaboration between psychologists and television producers, the term "understanding children" has been turned on its head. What we have here is a reversal of what Erikson, McFarland, Rogers, and others intended. "Young people," Giroux writes, "searching for purpose and hoping to establish independent identities are a particularly vulnerable group when faced with corporate giants such as Disney, which makes every effort to understand youth so as to develop marketing methods that are more camouflaged, seductive, and successful."<sup>130</sup> It is foremost to contrast the use of such psychologists by contemporary corporate children's media creators with the collaboration

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 3.

between Rogers and McFarland. The ethic of Rogers and McFarland was only made possible, however, by the establishment in 1952 of the National Education Television network,<sup>131</sup> which aired educational programming such as *MRN*. This is why *MRN* has remained one of a kind and provided a model for subsequent programming labeled, “educational.” Of course, the outstanding difference in approach correlates to the non-profit economic model of NET (later PBS) and the for-profit model of nearly all other television media networks.

Unlike the corporate-profit-driven economic framework of the reigning commercial networks (e.g. NBC, CBS, and ABC), NET was funded by the Ford Foundation, whose liberal and Progressive philanthropic mission was to advance human welfare. Organizations like Ford and the Carnegie Foundation began to focus on the prospects of an educational television network in the 1950s and 60s as an alternative to commercial programming. The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 “granted state sanction to the idea that commercial TV had failed to serve the interests of the American people,” according to Anna McCarthy. Further, “it enshrined in media infrastructure the idea that the most effective means for activating TV’s promise as an instrument of self-governance was to offer viewers a prosocial, culturally diverse complement to the degraded fare offered by the networks.”<sup>132</sup>

In his 1969 address to Congress in which he advocates for government funding for his and other PBS programming, he tells Senator Pastore that he “is very concerned, as I’m sure you are, about what is being delivered to our children in this country.” He

---

<sup>131</sup> National Educational Television was founded in 1952. It operated from 1954 to 1970, when it was renamed Public Broadcasting System (PBS).

<sup>132</sup> Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing By Television in 1950s America* (New York: New Press, 2010), 249.

follows this statement by saying that those in children's television production need not "bop someone over the head to create drama on the screen," criticizing the representation of Vaudevillian cheap thrills. He then details how his program deals with the authentic dramas of childhood "such as getting a haircut, or the feelings about brothers and sisters, and the kind of anger that arises in simple family situations." On his program, he says, "we deal with it constructively." Rogers notes how viewers in the cities of Boston, Pittsburgh, and Chicago actively requested the development of more *MRN* shows when they learned that the program might be cut due to lack of funding. "We've got to have more of this expression of care," he characterizes them as saying. Then, he confirms their description. "This is what I give...an expression of care every day to each child." Finally, after stating the lyrics of one of his program's standard songs in which he tells his viewer that he likes him/her "just the way you are," he says the following about the effects of his program on collective mental health. "If we in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, we will have done a great service for mental health."<sup>133</sup> Here, in addressing a Congressional assembly, Rogers ties his program and its pedagogical framework to the civic realm, detailing how his program assists in the healthy emotional development of American children.

Rogers was also keenly mindful of the rapidly growing consumer cultural ethos in the 1950s and 60s, created by an advertising culture that had infiltrated both print and electronic media. He very consciously constructed his program according to a different value system, arguably rooted in a residual Protestant and agrarian ethic that emphasized the importance of frugality, hard work, family, and community. In a 2011 panel at the

---

<sup>133</sup> Rogers, "Senate Statement on PBS Funding."

University of Pittsburgh on the legacy of *MRN*, which featured former producers of the program, several panelists noted that Rogers consistently rejected any proposals to mass produce and commodify in toy-form any characters or artifacts from the program. Rogers rejects the commercial model that gained dominance, as shown by Giroux. For example, Bill Isler, current CEO of the Fred Rogers Company, spoke about Rogers' emphatic rejection of Isler's proposition to manufacture toy "Trolleys" modeled after the trolley on *MRN*. According to Hedda Sharapan, a lead producer on *MRN* and current Director of Early Childhood Initiatives for the Fred Rogers Company, Rogers never "wanted parents to think that he was exploiting them."<sup>134</sup> Moreover, Rogers rejected the idea of replacing his handmade puppets with more polished, machine-made versions because he wanted child viewers to get the sense that they could construct similar, simply-crafted puppets of their own to play with. This illustrates the volition on the part of Rogers to maintain the show's iconography at an artisanal level and dovetails with the discussion in chapter one about his appreciation of the modes of production and social relations predominant in preindustrial society.

Critics and scholars alike have posited the notion that Rogers' project has elements of a countercultural project, especially in regards to the emerging consumer and commercial postwar culture. Patricia Pace argues that "Rogers TV aesthetic provides an antidote to those slicker television productions intent on the manufacture of kid-size consumers with adult appetites for commodified pleasures of all sorts."<sup>135</sup> In his essay

---

<sup>134</sup> "The Making of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, featuring Bill Isler, Hedda Sharapan, David Newell, Joanne Rogers, and Carl Kurlander, University of Pittsburgh Panel Event, 16 Sep, 2011. See "Pitt to Host Panel on the Making of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* Sept. 16," University of Pittsburgh News Services, <http://www.news.pitt.edu/news/pitt-host-panel-making-mister-rogers-neighborhood-sept-16>.

<sup>135</sup> Patricia Pace, review of Mary Collins and Mary Kimmel, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Children, Television and Fred Rogers, The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.3 (1998): 384.

“The Myth, The Man, The Legend,” National Public Radio television critic Dave Bianculli posits that “Fred Rogers combines the early television wizardry of Ernie Kovacs with a profound anti-commercial sensibility.”<sup>136</sup> Scholar Michael Long recently argued in his 2015 book, *Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers*, that the fundamental ethos of Rogers’ program is a radical religious and political pacifism operating against the dominant forces of violence and war in postwar American society.<sup>137</sup> In his verbal Senate testimony and his a document he wrote entitled “Philosophy, we can see how Rogers sets up his project as a sort of antithesis to the dominant commercial ethos of popular children’s television programming of the time and as such can be read as a countercultural effort.

### **Rogers’ “Philosophy”**

Drawing from his work in television (NBC and WQED), his theological studies, his study with McFarland and experiences at the Arsenal, Rogers developed *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*. In “Philosophy,” an undated document presumably written during the developmental stage of *MRN*, Rogers makes explicit his vision for the program. This vision was well thought-out and meticulously articulated on Family Communications stationery.<sup>138</sup> The first “premise” establishes that the program does not conceive of

---

<sup>136</sup> David Bianculli, “The Myth, The Man, The Legend,” in *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood: Children, Television, and Fred Rogers*, ed. Collins and Kimmel (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>137</sup> See Michael Long, *Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2015).

<sup>138</sup> In my archival research into these primary sources that show the meticulous care of Rogers and his staff, I will be mindful of the critical problem known as the “intentional fallacy” (William K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Lexicon* [Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954], 3). My perspective on the archival material and its relationship to the actual programs themselves and their reception will be dialogic in that I will assume Rogers to be an “author” in the sense theorized by Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F.

children as isolated individuals; rather, it stresses the child as embedded in a social and psychological family dynamic that spans at least two generations. The second “premise” calls for the television artist to become a participant in the viewer’s family dynamic. As Rogers breaks the “fourth wall”<sup>139</sup> and speaks directly into the television camera saying, “You are a very special person and I like you just the way you are,”<sup>140</sup> he becomes part of the child’s immediate, yet virtual, social environment, and thus a participant in the child’s world of family relationships. In the third and final premise for the show, Rogers envisions that each show will center upon a theme that correlates to “everyday growing experiences.”<sup>141</sup> Here, the emphasis is on finding wonder in life’s everyday experiences rather than the absurdist and escapist violence of slapstick comedy<sup>142</sup> prominent in the commercial children’s television of his time (e.g. *Tom and Jerry*, *Looney Tunes*, *The Bullwinkle Show*, *The Addams Family*).<sup>143</sup>

The second section in the “Philosophy” document focuses on what Rogers and his colleagues call the “elements” of the program. This document offers a list of topics, under

---

Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977): 124-27. Further, I will regard my critical performance as guided by current hermeneutical understanding of the work of the critic with respect to media texts. I will further elaborate on this point in the methodology section of this prospectus.

<sup>139</sup> The “fourth wall” is a term used in theater. It denotes the “imaginary wall” at the front of the stage in a traditional three-walled box set. The idea of the “fourth wall” was created by philosopher Denis Diderot in the eighteenth century. Speaking directly to the audience in theater or film is referred to as “breaking the fourth wall.” See Philip J. Auter and Donald M. David, “When Characters Speak Directly to Viewers Breaking the Fourth Wall in Television,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 68.1-2 (1991): 165-71.

<sup>140</sup> Rogers, “Philosophy,” Fred Rogers Archives, Folder “Videodiscs,” Box EU88.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> David Newell, interview with the author, 19 June, 2013, Pittsburgh, PA.

<sup>143</sup> Slapstick is “a type of physical comedy characterized by broad humour, absurd situations, and vigorous, usually violent action. The slapstick comic, more than a mere funnyman or buffoon, must often be an acrobat, a stunt performer, and something of a magician—a master of uninhibited action and perfect timing. Outrageous, make-believe violence has always been a key attraction of slapstick comedy and, fittingly, the form took its name from one of its favourite weapons” (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “slapstick,” accessed 26 June, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/548077/>). See also Christopher P. Lehman, *American Animated Cartoons of the Vietnam Era: A Study of Social Commentary in Films and Television Programs, 1961-1973* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).

the title, “elements,” that Rogers regards as indispensable to the framework of the *Neighborhood*. The list begins with “Adult to child relationship,” which asserts that Rogers will “play it straight;” that is to say that Rogers will not play a character other than his “real life” identity. As such, Rogers presents himself as a caring and reassuring parental figure, ensuring that the act of communication, which involves conversation, characterization, and situation, devolve around aspects of “everyday family life” as understood by 1960s norms.<sup>144</sup>

Indeed, in one of many recordings of Rogers and McFarland in conversation during the early years of the program, McFarland stresses that the real difference between *MRN* and “most television for children” is that *MRN* is “less a show for children and more real communication with them.” To this, Rogers responds, “I am an adult in relationship to the child, not working out some of my old needs in front of a group of children.” McFarland confers, “That’s right,” articulating that the difficulty involved for persons creating programs for children lies in the fact that the creative process itself is rooted in one’s own “experiencing of childhood.” She continues, “but to be able to differentiate oneself from the watching child is an essential part of making it an adult-child relationship.”<sup>145</sup> Here, McFarland stresses the imperative behavior necessary in order to create and maintain Rogers’ role as adult in relation to his child viewers. This choice appears to be rooted in the intention to keep the program grounded in everyday reality.

---

<sup>144</sup> It is important to note that one aspect of sociocultural television criticism involves the analysis of the occurring and recurring types of characters in television texts. As Kenneth Burke informs us, this kind of criticism views characters in televisual texts as social types of characters, not just representations of specific individual people. See Leah R. Vande Berg, Lawrence A. Wenne, and Bruce E. Gronbeck, “Cultural Criticism: General Approaches,” in *Critical Approaches to Television* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 400.

<sup>145</sup> Rubin, *Lessons From Mister Rogers*.

As we have discussed, the program is interested in helping the child grow and learn by providing a safe, manageable space to listen and explore the world with the guidance of a trusted adult. This aim, which functions in the realm of public service, informs all the choices made on the program. Rogers' role as himself, a calm and caring adult figure contrasts with much of the vaudevillian and burlesque entertainment styles of network children live action television programs of the time such as *The Howdy Doody Show* (1947-1960), *The Pinky Lee Show* (1954-1966), *Lunch with Soupy Sales* (1952-1962), *The Soupy Sales Show* (1964-1966) and others. In these programs, some of the adult characters clown around by imitating the behavior of the child.<sup>146</sup> This one reason why these programs are perceived as humorous. In *MRN*, the adult remains an adult and the child learns from the caring relationship with this adult. What is more, such shows were characterized by several entertainment commentators of the time as "hyper-stimulating"<sup>147</sup> and are likely what Rogers referred to in his Senate testimony when he referred to children's television as "bombardment." He once said, "There is so much that's so fast about television. Wherever you're placed on the television schedule you know very well that there's going to be some hyper thing before you, and it goes off in a very hyper way, so we have some music and movement right away to help make the

---

<sup>146</sup> It is important to note that there were other exceptions to the hyper-stimulation model in period television programs besides *MRN*. The figure of "Captain Kangaroo," played by Bob Keeshan on the program by the same name (1955-1984), is one. Rogers and Keeshan paired up for a 1979 PBS special, *Springtime with Mister Rogers*. Notably, Keeshan has stated that due to the strong profit motive, broadcasters are less likely to hand airtime over to children's television programs with adult hosts. See Gary H. Grossman, "Uncle Hosts and Other Video Relations," in *Saturday Morning TV* (New York: Popular Science Publishing Co., 1981), 105. Another example of a children's television program character who maintains the personality and orientation of a responsible, nurturing, adult figure is Shari Lewis (The *Shari Lewis Show*, 1960-1963). The following statement illustrates well the similarities between her educational philosophy of children's television and that of Rogers: "Self esteem comes from doing something and accomplishing something. It doesn't come from watching TV. I try to do activities, I try to turn TV into an activity" ("Lamb Chop creator Shari Lewis dead at 65," CNN.com, 3 Aug., 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/showbiz/tv/9808/03/shari.lewis.obit/>).

<sup>147</sup> Grossman, 123.



transition.”<sup>148</sup> Here, Rogers speaks to the ways that he tries to provide a gradual slowing down for a viewer who is likely tuning in to his program after watching a fast-paced program. The presence of this “real life” parental, neighborly, adult, figure then moves into the next “element” of the show – the respect for the “integrity of feelings.”<sup>149</sup> Here, Rogers’ objective is to demonstrate to the viewer that her feelings are identifiable (e.g., fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, joy), mentionable, and manageable.<sup>150</sup>

One of the most important “elements” articulated in the “Philosophy” document is Rogers’ emphasis on the distinction between reality and the imaginary, fantasy world of children. “Each show is conspicuously composed of reality and fantasy segments,” the document states. The show opens with Rogers coming into his “television home.” He then greets his television audience; together they exist on the same level of reality – in the material world, in the entryway of his home. “Routinely,” Rogers writes, the program “opens in the ‘real’ NEIGHBORHOOD with Mister Rogers entering his television house as though returning from the office” indicating that he has an adult life that he attends to outside of the home.<sup>151</sup> After this entrance, Rogers takes off his formal shoes and puts on his sneakers in an effort to indicate to the child viewer that he is entering a time and space where he is fully attentive to him. In this space he refamiliarizes himself with the viewer in conversational dialogue that introduces the ideas that will serve as the episodes themes. Then, after a discussion of such ideas, perhaps followed by an activity either in Rogers’ home or neighborhood, there ensues an invitation by Rogers to both imagine and visually

---

<sup>148</sup> Roderick Townley, “Fred’s Shoes,” in *Mister Rogers Neighborhood: Children, Television, and Fred Rogers*, 70.

<sup>149</sup> Rogers, “Philosophy,” 3.

<sup>150</sup> This phrase, that “feelings are mentionable and therefore manageable,” is used by Rogers in several interviews. He credits the idea to McFarland. See Rogers, interview by Herman.

<sup>151</sup> Rogers, “Philosophy,” 7.

travel to a story that is unfolding in “the neighborhood of make believe,” a theater in which puppets and human actors mingle in a drama.<sup>152</sup> As a child development specialist, McFarland no doubt taught Rogers about the importance of transitions in the child’s (and subsequently adult’s) everyday experience. Because transitions usually involve a great deal of cognitive, emotional, and physical effort for young children, transitional signposts like the entrance of the trolley into Rogers’ home, help children to prepare for the transition by signaling its impending arrival. McFarland considered transitions one of “the most important aspects of people’s lives.”<sup>153</sup> In a modern world that values high-paced movement and rapid production, it would seem that Rogers tries to provide a more human-centered speed of life that allows people to sustain concentration and manage tasks and events in a less rushed fashion. We tend, he says, “to hurry through transitions and to try to hurry our children through them as well. We may feel that these transitions are ‘nowhere at all’ compared to what’s gone before or what we anticipate is next to come.”<sup>154</sup>

The trolley, anthropomorphized by Rogers as “Trolley,” served as a transitional object helping the child make the adjustment from Rogers’ home to the “neighborhood of make believe.” According to the “Philosophy” document, there are many psychological

---

<sup>152</sup> While the presentation of puppets and humans in dialogue was present on his former show, *The Children’s Corner* as well as on WBKB’s *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* and the *Soupy Sales Show*, the integration of puppets and actors in the same dramatic situation is new and unique to the *Neighborhood*. For example, on both *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* and *The Shari Lewis Show*, puppets have sometimes silly, sometimes serious conversations with the female human leads with whom they conversed. On *The Howdy Doody Show*, the boy-like puppet character “Howdy Doody” interacted with the adult, cowboy character Buffalo Bob within a dramatic situation often characterized by confusion, chaos, excitement and anxiety. In *MRN*, the puppets and actors engage only in the “fantasy” segment of the program, the “Neighborhood of Make Believe” – an environment contrasted with that of “reality” and characterized by Rogers as “the playground of the imagination from which creative ideas and fine distinctions can be drawn and understood.” Furthermore, “Make-Believe,” according to Rogers, “serves as a laboratory of the imagination from where children can test options in behavior” (Rogers, “Philosophy,” 7-8).

<sup>153</sup> Townley, 68.

<sup>154</sup> Rogers, quoted in Townley, 68.

lessons at work in this fantasy environment, the chief objective of which is to instruct children in problem-solving methods and to offer them a “laboratory” where options for behavior are being tested.<sup>155</sup> In the “Reality-Fantasy” section of the “Philosophy” document, Rogers writes that

Reality provides real norms against which one’s progress can be compared and gauged; and reality provides a basis for what to expect in the future. Fantasy is the playground of the imagination from which creative ideas and fine distinctions can be drawn and understood; and the ability to distinguish abstract notions such as “good” and “bad” adds to the quality of real life.<sup>156</sup>

It is important here to note that fantasy is not divorced from reality. Fantasy, in this sense, does not refer to something false or delusional.<sup>157</sup> Here, Rogers demonstrates his understanding of child development as the primary target audience for his program are children at the preschool age, who, more than any other age group, live to engage in individual fantasy play as well as dramatic play with their peers. Similar to its function for the older toddler, play continues to foster skill development, reality exploration, and mastery of anxiety; “but imaginative play takes center stage in development, becoming an essential vehicle for constructing and understanding the world as well as facilitating cognitive and socio-emotional growth.”<sup>158</sup> These well-established theories of fantasy/imaginative play originated with Jean Piaget, the famous philosopher of child

---

<sup>155</sup> It is interesting to note that Rogers spent time with children at the Arsenal Family Center at least once a week in order to better understand them. Such interactions would take place in a kind of play room set up to test children’s actions and responses to various stimuli with adult supervision (Hedda Sharapan, interview with the author, 19 June, 2013, Pittsburgh, PA).

<sup>156</sup> Rogers, “Philosophy,” 7.

<sup>157</sup> In the field of child development, then and now, “fantasy play” is understood to be used by children to compensate for difficult feelings of inadequacy and fear. “The 4-year-old, for example, may be anxious about the fact that she is smaller and less competent than adults but compensates by playing adult roles or becoming idealized characters who represent power in her dramatic play. By becoming the powerful queen or heroine, she temporarily diminishes and masters feelings of inadequacy” (Davies, 289).

<sup>158</sup> Davies, 260.

development whose 1920s writings were translated into English in the 1940s and highly read in American child development and psychology programs in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>159</sup>

Finally, the “Philosophy” document allows us to see the unexpected and defining role that music will play in the program. Rogers, who graduated from Rollins College with a degree in music composition, wrote every song that was performed on the *Neighborhood*.<sup>160</sup> The document reveals that he believed that music offers “a mode of affective expression” and creative channeling for one’s inner feelings – a concrete example of what he calls an “invisible essential.”<sup>161</sup> As we saw earlier in his “Invisible Essentials” speech, Rogers employed music as a young boy to process his difficult and volatile emotions prompted by those who bullied him on a daily basis. “The insides of me,” says Rogers, “from the very beginning, have been connected to music.”<sup>162</sup> As Roderick Townley has observed, Rogers employs music on the show primarily as a transitional device. “I’ve always had the analogy of moving from one key to another in the program,” Rogers said. In this way, he “modulates” from the entry-way to the living room to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. The music reflects the kind of shift in feeling that comes with the change in environment and task. Rogers has described the ways that he plays with keys in transitioning from the living room of his home to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, saying that “you want to find as many notes in the new key that are the same as the notes in the old key. And you play with those and almost imperceptibly get into the new key.” For example, he says, in the modulation going from

---

<sup>159</sup> See Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood* (New York: Norton, 1962).

<sup>160</sup> Rogers wrote over 200 songs for the *Neighborhood*. See “Songs and Lyrics,” *The Neighborhood Archive: A Collection of All Things Mister Rogers*, accessed 3 July, 2013, <http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/>.

<sup>161</sup> Rogers, “Philosophy,” 9.

<sup>162</sup> Rogers, quoted in Townley, 70.

the key of C to the key of F, only the B-flat is a new note. Thus, “there are a lot of notes you can play as if you were playing in both keys. So little by little you get to F.”<sup>163</sup>

This use of music demonstrates Rogers’ interest in maintaining the child’s trust, an essential act that must consistently recur on the show after show in order to reestablish Rogers as a reliable fixture in the child’s life. Recall that secure attachment relationships between primary caretakers and the child are necessary for the child to feel safe and venture into the world of play and learning with confidence and emotional strength. In his book co-authored with Barry Head, *Mister Rogers: How Families Grow*, Rogers discusses “a child’s transition from the oneness with the mother to relationships with a world full of people—first other people in the family, and then all those people beyond.”<sup>164</sup> Townley observes the ways that this model functions on the neighborhood, in which Rogers gradually expands the child’s social familiarity from the primary relationship with him in the home, to the recurrent neighborhood characters such as Mr. McFeely, Betty Aberlin, Joe Negri and others, to nonregular, “drop-in guests” like Tony Bennett or Yoyo Ma. Such a dynamic mirrors the kind of concentric circles present in a child’s life starting with the primary relationship in the home, branching out to the neighborhood community and school, and then moving beyond into interactions with strangers.<sup>165</sup>

It is interesting to think about the ways that Rogers’ understanding of television, in its ability to create parasocial responses and relationships between actors on the screen and viewers, resonates with contemporary understandings of communication as a

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>164</sup> Rogers quoted in Townley, 70.

<sup>165</sup> Rogers, quoted in Townley, 71.

transactional process. As Brent Malin discusses in his recent book, *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology*, not until James W. Carey's groundbreaking 1989 work *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Culture*<sup>166</sup> did communication scholarship begin to shift away from the dominant paradigm of a "transmission model" that emphasizes "technology, efficiency, and impact at the expense of the interaction, dialogue, and community encompassed in the 'ritual view' that Carey favored."<sup>167</sup> As Malin notes, "the emphasis on transmission has resulted in communication teaching and research that focuses on how someone might best affect another person—or avoid being affected—rather than on how people join together in communal meaning making."<sup>168</sup> As we have seen in Rogers' own writings on television and his program, he seems to understand well the nature of the television practitioner's position within a social network of cultural and relational meaning-making, as discussed earlier in the chapter, in and among an interpersonal family communication unit, located within the larger culture of communication.

Twentieth and twenty-first century child development theory is grounded in a transactional model of development. This model establishes the child's transactions with the immediate and broader environments as fundamental to his/her development. Recent research integrating the science of neurology and child development has begun "to map transactional processes influencing brain development during the first year of life, demonstrating that physical touching, social interaction, and sensory stimulation promote

---

<sup>166</sup> See James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 13-36.

<sup>167</sup> Brent Malin, *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology and Emotion in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 31.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

physical brain growth and increase brain functions.”<sup>169</sup> This model identifies the ways the child, from the very beginning of life, works to organize his experience. The importance of the parental relationship, as well as that of other caregiving adults who interact with the child on a regular basis, is critical in healthy development as these individuals serve as the “conduits through which cultural values shape the child’s developmental possibilities.”<sup>170</sup> As such, Rogers and McFarland’s reading of television and its role in family dynamics is critical in understanding *MRN*’s interventional approach to influencing child development through this transactional model.

### **An Anthropocentric Christian-Based Intervention**

Rogers’ articulation of foundational Christian values such as simplicity, honesty, love, and the unique value of human beings and their relationships with one another undergird and direct his communication project. In several interviews and writings, he has noted that whenever he walks into the studio for a taping he prays silently, “Oh Lord, let some word that is heard be yours.”<sup>171</sup> He has noted that he conceives of the space between himself and the viewer as “holy ground.” In an interview with the *Christian Century*, he said, “we who make television for children must be especially careful with what we produce, with the people we present and with the attitudes we show in television relationships: attitudes of respect, kindness, healthy curiosity, determination and love.”<sup>172</sup> Yet while Rogers is clear about the influence of Christian precepts on his understanding of human life and behavior, his modern, pluralistic approach to his “ministry”

---

<sup>169</sup> Davies, 4.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Hollingsworth, 21.

<sup>172</sup> Belcher-Hamilton, 383.

significantly departs from more traditional, pietistic Christian practices and expressions.

In a collection of notes he dated September 19, 1984, just underneath the first phrase of the page, “Not total depravity, but total inability, Rogers jotted down the following “secrets of success:”

Find a need and fill it.  
“ “ “ “ hurt and heal it.  
“ “ “ “ problem and solve it.  
Success will always be unselfish.  
Success cannot tolerate alternatives.

He continued in his musing with the following progression:

We must never use t.v. to manipulate the minds of people to vote the way ‘we’ vote.  
We must preach to broken hearts. If we do we will always be up to date.  
Who marries the spirit of his age will soon find himself a widower.<sup>173</sup>

What are the classical human universal personal needs?  
What is the ultimate need that transcends all others (it’s anthropocentric not theocentric)  
Church has abandoned the human being to the psychologists.  
We must listen to the cry  
WILL TO MEANING FEEL I HAVE VALUE (self esteem, self worth)  
The function of the church is not to sell our theology to people. It’s to say ‘How can I help you?’

Freud: deepest human need is the will for pleasure  
Adler: “ “ “ “ to power (to feel you’re in control)  
Victor Frankel: “ “ “ “ to meaning (he then wrote Logo Therapy)  
Schuller: “ “ “ “ need to feel I have value.

Ego need needs satisfied.  
Jesus came to save us from shame (cleansed from sin).<sup>174</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> This line is a quotation by William Ralph Inge, a prominent religious and ecclesiastic English thinker in the early twentieth century. Inge was appointed to Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London in 1911 and was well known as a formidable cultural critic interested primarily in the concept of material progress. Inge sought to dispel the separation of fact and value and argued that a secure society was one rooted on the invisible and eternal values of truth, beauty, and goodness that ultimately are derived from God. See “Inge, William Ralph,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald M. Borchert (Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2006), 685-86.

<sup>174</sup> Rogers, Untitled notes, 19 Sep., 1984, Folder “Save Inspirational/Spiritual,” Box EU36, Fred Rogers Archive. In this note, Rogers first makes reference to the Calvinist move from total depravity to total inability. While this debate was of great importance to Reformed Protestants, this dissertation does not



Taken all together, these statements by Rogers amount to his ethos of “ethical emotionality,” encapsulated in the universal “need to feel I have value.” This translates into the fundamental iteration of *MRN*: ‘I like you just the way you are.’ I will offer a full discussion of this concept in relation to Rogers’ project in the third chapter. In closing this chapter, I will offer an analytical reading of these notes that connect the import of the program to the socio-cultural context in which it emerged. This set of notes offers textual evidence regarding Rogers’ interpretation of the signs of the times and how he found the artistic modes that connected his Christian-based message to the ongoing redefinition of childhood in part due to the influence of television in their lives.

It is striking to see Rogers’ attempts to reiterate to himself his primary values and mission. He highlights his core understanding of the mission of the Pastor—to identify and serve human spiritual needs. He then places this mission into dialogue with the most powerful and current theories of the human being developed by the new science of psychology. In this way, the document embodies in note form the dialectic he places at the center of *MRN* concerning these two distinct knowledge systems whose conclusions about human behavior, needs, and general psychic health often overlap.

Rogers begins by setting up three key problem-solution action models of approach for success. The first instructs one to “find a need and fill it;” the second

---

rehearse the centuries old discussion of the Calvinist proposition of total depravity and its subsequent thought on total inability. Rogers himself, in this document, appears to want to set aside this discussion of “total depravity” and move onto finding paths to success, which he understands as ‘finding a need and filling it,’ ‘finding a hurt and healing it,’ and ‘finding a problem and solving it.’ About twenty-five years later, the leaders of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary formulate a vision for their training of pastor-theologians” that is remarkably similar to Rogers’ approach to pastoral care that is not focused on sin but rather on healing and fostering communities of Gospel-inspired joy. The mandate for the theologian pastor is “I care, therefore I am” (See Kim, “Former Pastor-Theologians [2006-2009],” in *Ever A Vision*, 229). For an introduction to the complexities of the “Doctrine of Total Depravity,” see Thomas M. Gregory, “Presbyterian Doctrine of Total Depravity,” *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* Vol. 1, no. 27, July 2007.

proposes, “find a hurt and heal it;” and the third states “find a problem and solve it.” He then asserts that success is unselfish (agape); its objective is to serve the needs of the other rather than those of the self, e.g. clarifying theological positions or enforcing church doctrine. Unselfish success is the only possible definition of success; it “cannot tolerate alternatives.” Here, Rogers digs in his feet; his position is steadfast and unwavering regarding the imperative of approaching any ministerial act from a position of selflessness rather than doctrinal authority.<sup>175</sup> Success, therefore, only comes from a position in which the minister yields to the needs and concerns of the other, as opposed to one in which the minister asserts doctrine or judgments blindly. Adopting and practicing the Christian virtue of selflessness (caritas and agape) requires the subject to relinquish the initiation of action and control to the other. As a result, the role of the subject becomes centered on an act of listening and responding in the spirit of service as opposed to telling or lecturing.

Denis Costello discusses these ideas some thirty years later in a 2013 article entitled, “Selflessness as a Virtue in Social Work Practice.” In it, Costello adapts the work of Harlene Anderson (1997), asserting that for the social worker to be successful, she must refrain from entering “with formed ideas and plans about a client and the

---

<sup>175</sup> With this rhetoric, Rogers appears to enter into the nineteenth century American evangelical Christian debate between Samuel Hopkins and Jonathan Edwards over the problem of “disinterested benevolence.” Hopkins departed from Edward’s unwillingness to strip Christian love of all self-regard and essentially replaced the virtue of unselfishness with “the negative ideal of selflessness in an exaggerated attack on self-regard” (Stephen Post, “Disinterested Benevolence: An American Debate Over the Nature of Christian Love,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14.2 [1986]: 356). Edwards was skeptical of the radical renunciation of what he understood as the natural inclination of the self toward personal happiness, embracing a conception of self-regard as “the ‘joy’ of consent to being” (Ibid., 356-57). In this regard, self-regard as understood in terms of the larger social body of community does not include the negative associations with selfishness. Although Rogers insists on an unselfish approach, it would be unwise to read his statement here on unselfishness as an embrace of Hopkins’ ideal of selflessness considering Rogers deep regard for the importance of fostering healthy self-esteem and a sense of value in each individual.

problem or its solution” and instead maintain an “internal dialogical space.”<sup>176</sup> In establishing this “internal space” of listening and dialogue, the social worker inspires similar behavior in the client and the two engage in a different kind of communication. This is precisely what Rogers discovered and envisions as the ground of communication for his television program, which he hopes, despite the distance between the participants in the televisual communication activity, he is convinced will achieve success.

Anderson’s “discovery” that clients are prompted to have new conversations because the setup offers them a “new way of being in the world,” confirms Rogers’ own and much earlier identification of the genuine dialogical relationship that he aims to establish with his viewers. Further, Anderson, like Rogers and Arnett (later), posits that the engagement then becomes transformative because “conversation is more than simply talking. In its fullest sense it can be thought of as the very essence of our existence.” In this dynamic, the traditional role of the “authority” is transfigured from one who imparts knowledge and is the repository of the meaning of rules and values into one who listens and learns from others and offers response in a dialogue.<sup>177</sup> Such understanding of communication and learning is evocative of Freire’s critique of the banking approach to education in which the authority “answers his own questions, by organizing his own program.”<sup>178</sup> In contrast, for the dialogical educator, whose approach is founded upon “love, humility, and faith,” emotional terms that speak of an ethical emotionality, dialogue becomes “a

---

<sup>176</sup> Harlene Anderson, quoted in Costello, “Selflessness as a Virtue in Social Work Practice,” *Social Work and Christianity* 40.3 (2013): 273.

<sup>177</sup> Also notable in this dynamic is a relational setup in which the teacher structures the space of the dialogue and employs an invitational rhetoric to elicit dialogue.

<sup>178</sup> Freire, 74.

horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between dialoguers is the logical consequence.”<sup>179</sup>

Having established that success can only come from a position of selflessness, Rogers decries those who use the medium of television to “manipulate” the minds of others in order to get them to “vote the way ‘we’ vote.”<sup>180</sup> Here, he appears to reject Walter Lippmann’s vision of public opinion management<sup>181</sup> and offers second exploration into the question of selflessness. The act is selfish because is only interested in fulfilling the wishes of the persons initiating the engagement. Rogers’ approach consistently emphasizes the worth of the other, the receiver of the message. He actively refrained from any actions that he thought could betray the trust (good will) he had established with his viewers. For example, in 1984 he testified in support of a Supreme Court decision that allowed Sony to sell home video recording devices by arguing that it would allow television users to become more active in programming their family’s television schedule. “Very frankly,” he stated then,

I am opposed to people being programmed by others. My whole approach in broadcasting has always been ‘You are an important person just the way you are. You can make healthy decisions.’ Maybe I am going on too long, but I just feel that anything that allows a person to be more active in the control of his or her life, in a healthy way, is important.<sup>182</sup>

Rogers’ comment regarding the manipulation of television viewers in this excerpted testimony from the Supreme Court case, *Sony Corp v. Universal City Studios* (both of which were coincidently articulated in 1984) illustrates the high value that Rogers, as a Protestant, places on the individual’s freedom.

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>180</sup> Rogers, 1984 notes, Fred Rogers Archive, Speech Box 1.

<sup>181</sup> See Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

<sup>182</sup> Kimmel and Collins, “The Wonder of It All,” 25.

However, his value of individual freedom and individualism does not reaffirm anything like the laissez faire doctrine of individualism in the past. In fact, what Rogers is proposing is a declensionist/restorationist position critiquing the new “utilitarian individualism” as identified by Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton (1985). In their book *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Bellah and his co-authors contend that the kind of human-relational individualism that was once common in American society has been eroding. They use Robert and Helen Lynd’s extensive sociological studies of the American community of Muncie, Indiana (*Middletown*) to illustrate “the decline of the culture of the independent citizen, with its strong biblical and republican elements, in the face of the rise of the business (managerial) class and its dominant ethos of utilitarian individualism.”<sup>183</sup> Rogers seeks to restore this human-relational individualism of the American Protestant tradition through a reformulation of an ‘I and Thou’ ethic. Perhaps this is why he quotes Inge’s “He who marries the spirit of the age will soon find himself a widower.” He is particularly rejecting what C.B. MacPherson has called “possessive individualism.” Constantly at work in asserting a transformative philosophy of the individual in which the sovereign ‘I’ of the individual gives way to the ‘I’ of ethical emotionality in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship, Rogers reasserts this once dominant, now counter-cultural ethos.

In this regard, Rogers’ quest for the transformation of the ministry into a practice based on an ‘I-Thou’ relationship model dovetails with the discussions that arose during the 1950s and 60s at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. When Rogers writes that “those

---

<sup>183</sup> Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 48.

who preach to broken hearts will remain relevant in contemporary life” while “those who wed themselves to the spirit of the times will find themselves widowed” he is intervening also into discussions concerning the mission of the church in the current historical moment. Without taking sides with either the traditional pietists or with the neo-orthodoxy reformers in the church, who constitute the two primary poles of the discussion, Rogers offers a third way. With striking brevity, he addresses the benefits and dangers of the reformists, who, in response to the “cries of human hurt, anger, and need” arising from the crises of urban poverty and race relations went as far as asking why the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary was not becoming “more of a social service agency?”<sup>184</sup> Rogers affirms the reform spirit of this Social Gospel branch in praising the timeless relevance of ministering to broken people as emphasized in the Gospel. He follows this, however, with a warning to refrain from becoming too attached to the messages and spirit of the times. In this regard, he appears to view the potential for confusing the Christian directive to minister to the broken with the secularist, social justice ethos of the 1960s and 70s. His third way, based on the ‘I-Thou’ relationship of Christian care, would set a general societal climate of values that in the long run addresses the problem of poverty and isolation in society at large through a social pedagogy that stresses an ethic of care as practice (rather than a set of rules). This pedagogy involves particular acts of caring and habits of mind, which he models on *MRN*, that should inform all aspects of moral life.<sup>185</sup> Thus, the ministry does not need to duplicate the work of the state nor should the church unquestionably follow the tenets of “sociological, urban, and psychological

---

<sup>184</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Ever A Vision: A Brief History of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1959-2009* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 59.

<sup>185</sup> See Gabriel Eichsteller and Sylvia Holthoff, “Social Pedagogy as an Ethical Orientation Towards Working With People –Historical Perspectives,” *Children Australia* 35.4 (2011): 176-86.

concerns.”<sup>186</sup> Neither should the function of the church be to “sell our theology to people,” Rogers asserts. Affirming his discovery, he states the church’s mission is to ask “how can I help you?”

Departing from the conviction that “the ultimate human need is anthropocentric” and not theocentric, Rogers addresses the controversy between pietists or conservatives, who focus on more traditional understandings of Christian practice such as prayer, witness, and theology and the reformist branch of the church interested in applying the Gospel to social work in the community. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary came into existence in 1958 by way of the merging of two Pittsburgh seminaries – Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary. From the moment of its inception, PTS dealt with an underlying conflict between Western students, who embraced contemporary theology and were considered more liberal and modern, and Pitt-Xenia students, who were more interested in the “traditional understanding of Christian faith as well as the classical signs of personal piety.” Western students often criticized Pitt-Xenia students for practicing their faith in insular, strict, and old-fashioned ways. The emphasis at Pitt-Xenia was placed on the “gospel ministry” whereas Western stressed the “pastorate.”<sup>187</sup> These two approaches were joined in the establishment of

---

<sup>186</sup> McKim, *Ever A Vision*, 59.

<sup>187</sup> The tension between these two camps only increased as the issues raging in the wider American culture, e.g. the race problem and the Vietnam War took hold. The battle over which direction the Seminary would move in was determined under the leadership of President William H. Kadel, who, in 1972 established a committee to determine, through institutional dialogue and discussion, the goals and mission of the new institution. The committee crafted, among other suggestions, a section that listed the characteristics of the type of student who the seminary wishes to graduate. It read as follows: “1. One who is able to teach what the Gospel is and how it speaks to contemporary life; 2. One who has a thorough knowledge of the classic theological disciplines as well as practicing knowledge of sociology, psychology and behavioral sciences. 3. One who has a basic commitment to the parish ministry, although not all students need to enter the parish ministry. 4. One prepared to be a Teaching Elder as well as a Social Activist, who will also recognize the possibility of positive values of diverse opinions within the church. 5. One who is sensitive to persons where they are at a particular time, who will also have the capacity to hear what people are saying or perhaps are attempting to say, with a knowledge of how to live with people at the point of their need. 6.

PTS, which placed heightened value on educating persons “for the work of the Christian ministry.”<sup>188</sup>

In this context, Rogers’ statement that “church has abandoned the human being to the psychologists” calls for a delicate assessment. On the one hand, it would seem that Rogers’ keen interest in child psychology would hardly qualify him for claiming that the church has “abandoned” persons to psychologists. However, if one takes into consideration Rogers’ understanding of his craft and ministry as a healer/healing, departing from the Christian understanding of the care involved in the ‘I-Thou’ relationship, then his criticism of the church makes sense (especially to those who claim that the church’s main concern is theology and prayer). As William Guy notes in his essay on *MRN* theology, Rogers’ emphasis on care for the other contrasts not only with secular media messages of “I can have it all” but also with a theocentric theology that asserts that “I as an individual can and must be saved by establishing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>189</sup> Both worldviews, Guy asserts lack any attention to “other people.”<sup>190</sup> On the contrary, his entire enterprise attempts to harness the insights of child development theory into his communication art in order to convey and act out an ‘I-

---

One who has both desire and ability to communicate with all types of persons, i.e., not only with the economically deprived but also with the better educated, more sophisticated laymen who in the newer generations make a growing fraction of the population. 7. One who has the ability to implement programs without alienation of various congregational or community elements. 8. One who possesses sufficient knowledge of church polity to know the place and appreciate the values of the judicatory. 9. One who has desire and ability in practicing pastoral skills. 10. One who *really can be* an enabler” (McKim, *Ever A Vision*, 91-92). The list is striking in the ways that it seems to describe the characteristics of Rogers, almost to a “T.” In this way, Rogers seems to be the expression of the new mission of the seminary, which, by way of this text, known as “Exhibit A,” clearly moves in the direction of the more liberal, modern direction of Christianity. In this sense, it is illustrative of the period in the ways it reflects the community’s “desire to reach out ecumenically...in a post-Vatican II context” (McKim, *Ever A Vision*, 88), and spread the Gospel in ways that were perceived as more modern, pluralistic, and cosmopolitan.

<sup>188</sup> McKim, *Ever A Vision*, 26.

<sup>189</sup> Guy, “The Theology of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,” in *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, 116.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.



Thou' relationship. Rogers' new understanding of Christian ministry calls for an integration of the insights of psychology with the message of the Gospel. This criticism of the church identifies the trend, well established by 1984, in which the psychologist has essentially replaced the church as an institution that helps people work through emotional, though not spiritual, wounds.

In these notes, Rogers is critical of particular positions of the church and the television industry. He disagrees with those who think that spreading the Gospel translates into "selling Christian theology." For him, evangelization requires the healing of hearts. In regards to psychology, he seems to question whether this practice/discipline is fit to replace the position of the church in society. In regards to the television industry, he decries the use of the medium as a tool for political manipulation and the commercialism that posits the viewer as a consumer – that is to say an object of capitalist exploitation.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>191</sup> From the moment that the massive and instant communication power of radio revealed itself to the American public-at-large, a debate over its uses and control arose that eventually divided itself along the lines of the interests of industry on the one hand, and the interests of civic society on the other. Prominent voices of the early 1920s hailed radio's democratic potential as a tool capable of leveling class boundaries through information dissemination. Further hope was articulated in arguments positing that radio could promote mutual understanding and a thicker social fabric – that marginalized Americans such as farmers, the poor, the domestically-bound, and the uneducated – could be brought into the mainstream of society (see Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004], 309). It was also during this period, however, that commercial interests began expanding their radio activities (see Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996], 18). For this reason, questions of how the spectrum should be allocated and programming should be funded came into the fore. Regardless of this ambiguity, however, public sentiment held that nonprofit broadcasting should play a significant part and ideally a dominant role in the US system and commercial advertising on the radio, it was held, should be regarded with great skepticism (see Robert McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008], 159.) "The marketplace model," writes Engelman, viewed its audience as consumers motivated by self-interest (Engelman, 39). In contrast, the public service model approached its radio listeners as citizens whose participation in national and civic life required knowledge and information. In response to the enactment of the Radio Act of 1927, which created a Commission to regulate the spectrum that arguably favored moneyed interests, non-profit educational broadcasters organized in search of protection against the threats of commercialization. The perceived incompatibility between radio as a public resource and the concession of radio airwaves to commercial interests gave way to the emergence of various voices who joined forces in a struggle for airwave

Rogers' parting with both the theological and the social activist approach dilemma is evident in his concept of an anthropocentric approach to human suffering. This third way is further evinced when he writes that, "there is nothing magic about faith in God. It stems from very human roots." This theology, which honors the human person's unique worth and emphasizes how he is made in the image of God, is repeated in various linguistic and visual discourses on each program. A reoccurring segment in which "Mister Rogers" visits neighborhood workplaces exemplifies this point as Rogers emphasizes the work of human hands by placing the worker at the center of the visit. Rogers concludes his reflection on the human roots of knowing God by arriving at the very crux of the Christian faith.

God knows [that faith in him stems from very human roots]. God's son came in human form so that we might be able to believe all the more in God's trustworthiness, discipline and care—so that we might believe in God's love!<sup>192</sup>

The anthropocentric approach is thus what enables Rogers' achievement of creating a television program for children that while deeply rooted in the foundational message of love and care in the Gospel is at the same time able to dispense with theological or Christological language and iconography.

---

distribution and control but who ultimately lost the battle for a non-commercial broadcasting system. A plethora of organizations were born out of this impending struggle. Academically-oriented radio educators who organized the Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations (ACUBS) in 1925 lobbied unsuccessfully for Congress to allocate a block of station channels to states for use by land-grant institutions. Congress rejected their proposal arguing that such a move would establish a precedent for other "special interest groups" (22). Setting a precedent for the future of broadcast regulation, the FRC did not consider advertising a special interest because it could potentially provide the financial basis for programming for a mass audience. By the 1950s, when Rogers entered the realm of broadcast production, the new medium was television, but the commercial foundation still reigned. Still, noncommercial broadcast advocates saw in the newest communications medium, an opportunity for noncommercial media to reestablish itself. With the support and help of a few educational broadcasters interested in television, the Ford Foundation "virtually invented noncommercial television" by gathering forces together for the allocation of spectrum space and for the establishment of a friendly institutional infrastructure (136).

<sup>192</sup> Fred Rogers, "The Beginning of Faith," in "Faith Through the Eyes of a Child," Monday, 2 May, 1983, Folder "These Days, 1983," Box EU88, Fred Rogers Archive.

### **Conclusion: A Third Way**

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways that Rogers, by putting to work psychological and ethical insights derived from his experience with children at the Arsenal Family and Children's Center, figured out how to communicate ways of making meaning in the world. Rogers connects deeply with children at various stages in their development, a skill that he learned studying child development and working with Arsenal children. In the elaboration of his craft, he developed a dialogical communication ethics and practice centered on learning and the creation of meaning, which he later honed and developed for the television medium. With its focus on mutuality, learning from one another, and active 'I-Thou' engagement, this model, I have shown, was not only difficult to deploy by means of a mass communication technology like television, but in fact seems to stand paradoxically against the nature of "mass" communication. Rogers, however, proved prescient in his understanding of television as a paradoxically personal mass medium. He correctly assessed the socially affective potential of the new technology in ways described by Horton and Wohl in their theorization of the parasocial dimension of episodic television programming. Further observing and analyzing how television viewers displayed a mesmerized state similar to that of a baby suckling at the mother's breast, Rogers developed an understanding of television communication practice that identified the medium's power to affect human perception on a deeply personal and social level.

Rogers' analysis discovers that people respond to characters on television in the same affective manner they associate with members of their immediate peer group

(Horton and Wohl) or family (Rogers and McFarland). He realizes the importance of developing an ethic of communication that goes beyond the individual and asserts essential community values such as charity, the dignity of the human person, *caritas*, acceptance, and respect. As William Guy notes in his essay on the theology of *MRN*,

What Mister Rogers is ‘preaching’...is cooperative (TYPO), communal life – the covenant community if one prefers, or even the Kingdom of God. His parables suggest that the answer to our problems of personal dissatisfaction lies in the establishment of a community in which people look out for each other and are looked out for in return.<sup>193</sup>

In this kind of community, one defined by care of the self and other,<sup>194</sup> one cannot conveniently “deny others as centers of importance corresponding to oneself,” as the bullies of his childhood were able to do to him.<sup>195</sup> It is from this understanding, based on his own experience and New Testament theology, that Rogers grounds his ethic in the image of the wounded healer, a position which he seems to have adopted as a result of the bullying he experienced as a young boy and one that functions out of a core ethos of mutuality and dialogue. As Guy notes, care of the other is *the* most prominent topic of the Gospel, as exemplified in the story of the loaves and fishes in which Jesus promises that all good things will be granted if people seek first the kingdom of Heaven and the righteousness of God. When the disciples point out that there is a shortage of food to share with the larger group and suggests that they send the crowd away, Jesus tells them ‘they don’t have to go away, you feed them yourselves (Matthew 14.16). He then creates a multitude of food to share with everyone – indeed thousands of people. In contrast with

---

<sup>193</sup> Guy, “The Theology of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,” 116.

<sup>194</sup> See Foucault’s essays on Care of the Soul (*epimeleia*), see Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

<sup>195</sup> Guy, “The Theology of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,” 116.

the Hebrew concept of righteousness in which society's victims' rights are restored, Jesus posits that if we care for and share with others, everyone will benefit. As the disciples are inclined to cling to and protect their goods, Jesus calls for them to abandon their protective ways, adopt an open outlook of faith and care, which results in benefits for all.

This communication ethics implies not just individual choices and commitments but community understanding. For Rogers, healing occurred when he came to acknowledge and communicate the pain he experienced in the form of music, an art form universally known for the expression of deep and profound emotions.<sup>196</sup> As the wounded healer, he brings together "invisible essentials," messages that communicate that which is "invisible to the eyes" and connect with the viewer's own invisible interiority. Rogers sees the heart as the organ of his vision and offers himself to the viewer as the neighbor who can be trusted with the viewer's inner feelings and emotional needs. Such an ethic of trust involves an 'I-Thou' relationship as theorized by Buber, out of which Rogers' ethical emotionality develops, producing a third way alternative to a variety of cultural and political tensions present within an American society caught up in a revolutionary moment of change within the creative-destruction cycles of advanced capitalism. In this regard, his "attention to the feelings of individuals and to the holiness of each heart's affections," Guy notes, illustrates Rogers' reverence and celebration of life within what Pope John Paul II termed "a culture of death"<sup>197</sup> and Adrienne Rich described as a "death-culture of quantification, abstraction, and the will to power which has reached its

---

<sup>196</sup> See Dorothy Miell, Raymond MacDonald, and David J. Hargreaves, *Music Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>197</sup> Pope John Paul II decried the normalizing of what he termed a "culture of death" in his 1995 Papal Encyclical, "Evangelium Vitae," translated as "The Gospel of Life" (Paul Galloway, "John Paul Condemns 'Culture of Death,'" *Chicago Tribune*, 31 March, 1995). He cited examples of abortion on demand, the increased use of euthanasia, and capital punishment as illustrative of a postmodern society in which such "moral crimes" are justified by a misguided understanding of individual rights.

most refined destructiveness in this century.”<sup>198</sup> Undoubtedly, Rogers asserts an anthropocentric affirmation of love and care that emerges from his understanding that “there is a divine personal force at the center of reality” and that this force “has no instruments other than human beings by which or through whom to convey its feelings about those same human beings.”<sup>199</sup>

In regards to the tensions within the Presbyterian church (and Christian churches within the society at large), where modern liberals advocate movement away from pietist understandings of Christianity in favor of a stronger emphasis on social-services, Rogers offers also a third way. By speaking the Gospel to contemporary life, integrating his knowledge of classical theological disciplines with modern disciplines such as psychology and the behavioral sciences, “recognizing the possibility of positive values of diverse opinions” inside and outside the church, being “sensitive to persons where they are at a particular time,” and listening to understand people’s points of need, Rogers constructs this third way.<sup>200</sup> He honors and puts into practice the Seminary’s call to develop the “skills needed for ministry in our times.” Rogers seeks to build communication bridges between his Protestant beliefs and a 60s culture that placed increasing value on liberal tenets such as social reform attendant to racial discrimination and urban poverty. PTS’ “Exhibit A,” called for a historic development in the training the pastor to become at once a “teaching elder” and “social activist” in order to honor the “diverse opinions in the church.”<sup>201</sup> Such missionary transformation identified “sensitivity” as a key disposition for a pastor in regards to extending communication to

---

<sup>198</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 285.

<sup>199</sup> Guy, “The Theology of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,” 110-11.

<sup>200</sup> McKim, *Ever a Vision*, 92.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

diverse groups.<sup>202</sup> Rogers cultivated an ‘I-Thou’ sensitivity, coupled with his direct interpersonal and dialogical communication approach with viewers on a mass communication level that allowed him to negotiate a space in which he could function as both a “teaching elder,” in the ways he communicated the fundamental teachings of the Gospel, and “social activist,” in the ways he reached out to serve others. He taught his “flock” a way to understand and constructively manage their feelings in order to foster “healthy” growth and development. Moreover, Rogers is firm in his understanding of this reform as it intended to ensure that modern knowledge systems such as psychology do not overshadow the primary messages of Gospel. Thus, while he wants to provide his viewers a space of therapy, he does not marry his enterprise to psychology in general and expresses concern that the church has ceded all healing powers in American society to psychology.

In the Arsenal, Rogers learned that children’s specific cognitive and emotional development would be crucial to his enterprise of reaching their particular subjectivities. In this respect, his program appeared at a moment when conventional wisdom about child-raising had dramatically shifted from a perspective that advocated treating children as little adults to one that recognized their special needs (i.e. secure attachment, ritual and repetition, predictability, clear expectations) for healthy development. Thus his own insights dovetailed closely with a new and “enlightened” cultural understanding of “child development.” Through the integration of this technical knowledge on child development and his own understanding of the human person’s most essential needs as learned through personal experience and his religious training, Rogers developed a third way in thinking

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 94

about children's television as a critical tool for fostering ethical and emotionally "healthy" subjects. As Guy observes, Rogers' theology is "grounded in realistic psychology, a determination to deal with the human creature as he or she really is, not to issue dicta about the way said creature ought to be, in purposeful disregard of how our psyches really function."<sup>203</sup> In this way, *MRN* consistently works through potentially difficult feelings such as jealousy, inadequacy, shame, doubt, pride, and anger in dramatic and dialectical forms in order to understand and penetrate until eventually arriving at "glimpses of a less defensive, more trusting way of operating in the ethical realm."<sup>204</sup>

Finally, Rogers' communication project culminates in offering a third way for adults to negotiate the pressures and tensions of a rapidly changing socio-cultural and economic postwar culture. In his *Neighborhood*, Rogers offers an affirmation of the critical bonds of community essential to sustaining human life and a return to the "simple," enduring values and manageable social structures of old. He celebrates the home as a space of bonding and security, and the neighborhood as a place where people interact and work in fellowship and for the common goal of living together peacefully. Cultural critics of the period often voiced growing alarm about the rampant individualism, growing polarization, and alienation emerging during the period. In 1970, Phillip Slater wrote that "One of the first goals of a society is to make its inhabitants feel safe... Yet Americans feel far less safe, both at home and abroad, than they did fifty years ago. Our nuclear arsenal, the guns under pillows, and the multiple lock on city doors betray our fears

---

<sup>203</sup> Guy, "The Theology of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*," 106.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.



without easing them.”<sup>205</sup> Rogers identified this sign of the times and recognized the ways that slapstick and violent images on television were only adding to the collective unease and hysteria. Thus, though his enterprise overtly targets a child audience, Rogers simultaneously seeks to address the suffering and insecure feelings of American adults who are busy adjusting and readjusting to the rapid changes of advanced capitalism while simultaneously instructing their children about how to live in such a dynamic and complex world.<sup>206</sup> With his third way, he offers a space of safety, security, empathy and mutual understanding. As such, he not only ministers to the emotional needs of adults, he offers them a model of parenting and behaving with children that, in its pedagogical way, provides relief and a sense of control.

---

<sup>205</sup> Philip Eliot Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 1.

<sup>206</sup> It is interesting here to note the criticism of Rogers that decries his “wimpishness,” “his supposed womanliness,” “his less-than-rugged manliness,” and his “soft-hearted sentimental irrelevance.” Such criticism more often than not came from men, often fathers, who likely found his attention to feelings unfitting of American manliness and manhood. Indeed, Rogers challenges norms of the time regarding a proper masculinity that included certain traits deemed necessary for men to succeed and survive in a brutally competitive, individualistic (every man for himself) capitalist society such as aggressiveness, stoicism, courage, toughness, ruggedness, and competitiveness (See R. W. Connell’s popularization of “hegemonic masculinity” in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987]). Guy proposes that Rogers’ way of being and engaging poses a threat to the power and authority involved in such masculine norms and that more than likely, these critics of Rogers’ “improper” masculinity come from a place of envy. “They must reject the caring ethos of the Neighborhood because they would so much like to partake of it; yet they are afraid to let down their defenses and admit that they too are vulnerable human beings” (Guy, “The Theology of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,” 112). While traditional American masculinity rejects expressions of vulnerability because such expression shows weakness, Rogers’ holds to the critical belief that what is branded in the world as “weakness” is actually the “divinest strength” in the ways that it “affords an opportunity for the divine affirmation of individuals to shine through and for familial bonds to be forged between people” (Ibid.).

## CHAPTER 3:

### Inside *MRN*: Objects, Play, and the Cultural Dialectic

During the opening song of *MRN*, Mister Rogers enters his “television house” smiling and looking into the camera singing:

*It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood  
A beautiful day in the neighborhood,  
Would you be mine?  
Could you be mine?*

*It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood,  
A neighborly day for a beauty,  
Would you be mine?  
Could you be mine?*

*I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you!  
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you  
So let's make the most of this beautiful day  
Since we're together we might as well say,  
Would you be mine?  
Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor?  
Won't you please,  
Won't you please?  
Please won't you be my neighbor.*

In a matter of four lyrical stanzas, Rogers establishes an immediate, dialogical relationship with the individual viewer by employing a direct, sustained, interpersonal greeting. This greeting is enacted by clear and unmistakable verbal and nonverbal messages that guide the social and emotional act of coming together in relationship. The first four lines of the song establish the foundational ‘I-Thou’ relationship of mutuality that characterizes the program. Mister Rogers first acknowledges the day, which he describes adoringly as “beautiful,” and then he invites the viewer to step into it with him in a rather intimate way: “Would you be mine?” he asks. Notice how his invitation is not

a statement, such as “Welcome to the program” or “It’s good to see you,” as is the case with many television programs both old and new in which the host addresses the viewer(s) directly.<sup>1</sup> Rather, and quite significantly, Rogers delivers his greeting in the form of a question: “Would you be mine?” he asks.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the most prominent and widely viewed children’s television programs of the 1950s was *Howdy Doody*. This program begins with a shot of a cuckoo clock, its hands spinning out of control around the clock face while the clock shakes violently against a black screen and a bell dings rapidly. A fireball emerges from the clock’s door and spins as it comes closer and closer towards the viewer, and then explodes. Cymbals crash as the fireball fades out and the face of a freckled, white cartoon-like boy appears in the center of the screen. His mouth opens, revealing his status as a puppet, and he says, “Say kids, what time is it?” What sounds like a crowd of at least a dozen kids then scream, “It’s Howdy Doody Time!” as the puppet’s face is overcast by large, carnival font that read, “HOWDY DOODY” in all caps. The program then opens on the freckled face puppet, Howdy Doody, his full puppet body “standing” in on a stage in front of a curtain. He greets the in-house child audience with a loud, “Well, How-dee-doody kids” and then turns to greet the human host of the show, Buffalo Bob Smith. Bob is a gruff, loud, and large man in a kiddie cowboy costume, who says a voluminous hello to Howdy Doody and then says assertively, looking into the camera, “Say, boys and girls at home, and kids here in the gallery, stay right where you are kids because you’re going to see Howdy Doody stop Mr. X’s fedoozler with our sensational new invention, the switcheroo.” He then raises his voice and shouts to the group of children sitting next to him in the gallery, “But first, come on gang let’s go!” The prompt is met by the gallery children who begin to sing, “It’s Howdy Doody Time,” the kind of “catch-song” of the show. The camera pans their faces, some blank, some excited, others visibly confused as they all sing in unison the *Howdy Doody* theme song. At the end, Bob Smith proceeds immediately into a theatrical scene that ensues in the theater just off from the gallery. To be sure, the opening scenes of *Howdy Doody* create a sense of disorder and chaos, with the one grownup in the shot behaving like a grown child, shouting at the gallery children to burst out in song. Its message, from the beginning explosive clock scene on, seems to be: “This is a time to let off steam in an unstructured, nonsensical, and carnivalesque kind of way.” The gallery children, who act like a kind of Greek chorus directed by man-child Bob Smith, sit and sing in all different body poses, some looking at the camera, others at each other, and still others at Bob Smith to their right and Howdy Doody to their left. The producers attempt to grant some power to the gallery children and home audience by having them sing the opening song. But real sense that the children occupy a place of shared power on the program is lost by the air of disorder and neglect revealed by their undisciplined bodies, their lack of energy, and the song’s lyrics, which introduce the main players of the show and work to cement their power and agency. Notice also that the invitation to enter into *Howdy Doody* time is directed to a group of children – the dozen or so children in the show’s gallery and the viewers at home. The message to the viewer is, you are one of many, and like the distracted and disorderly children in the gallery, you are one face in an audience of many. Your job is to assume the role of theatrical spectator.

<sup>2</sup> The opening song lyrics also hint at Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation in the sense that Rogers’ rhetoric calls at a willing subject and the subject has no alternative but to recognize and respond to the interpellating agent. Althusser refers to St. Paul, who “admirably put it, it is in the ‘Logos,’ meaning in ideology,” that we “live, move and have our being” (Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey [Edinburgh Gate: Pearson, 2009], 309). For Althusser, you and I are “*always-already*” subjects and in this regard we are constantly practicing the rituals and rites of ideological recognition, “which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable, and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects (Ibid., 310). That is to say that, as Althusser continues, calling upon his reader to recognize the ideological work he and his reader are doing together, “the writing I am currently executing and the reading you are currently performing are also in this respect rituals of ideological recognition, including the ‘obviousness’ with which the ‘truth’ or ‘error’ of my reflections may impose itself on you” (Ibid.). In this example, the individual hailed is the

What are the differences in affect and in relationship between these two greetings? I would argue that the statement, “Welcome to the program; it’s good to see you,” sets up a one-way, sender-receiver kind of communication transaction, in which the sender holds power and authority. In contrast, the receiver falls into a subject position characterized by passivity and voicelessness.<sup>3</sup> The speaker asserts himself into the viewer’s mental space and occupies it.

In contrast, Rogers’ greeting construction, “Would you be mine? Could you be mine?” creates a transactional space for interpersonal exchange between he and the viewer. He asks the viewer to enter the space with him, and in a most intimate way. With “Would you be mine?” he beckons the viewer to become his own, as in a love relationship. “Would you be mine,” a question we could envision a young man saying to his sweetheart or a mother to her baby, creates a kind of immediate and intimate sense of bonding and togetherness. Further, in this invitational question, Rogers humbles himself to the viewer, asking her if what he proposes is agreeable to her. In this way, Rogers’ gesture communicates a handing off of his speaking privileges to the receiver in order to create this sense of equal dialogical exchange that levels the plane of interaction, along with an ‘I-Thou’ relationship of mutuality.

---

reader, who engages in reading Althusser’s prose, just as the subject walking down the street turns around in response to interpellation. From an Althusserian perspective, Rogers’ dialogical, invitational approach to addressing his viewer could indeed serve as a notable illustration of the concept of interpellation and the ways that persons become subjects as they mentally and physically turn “one-hundred-and-eighty-degree[s]” to attend to the call (Ibid.).

<sup>3</sup> Amy Cuddy’s social-scientific research on the ways that power works socially shows that when a person exerts a high-power body pose or attitude in conversation with another, more often than not, the dialogical partner assumes a low-power behavior that contributes to the initially established dynamic. See Amy Cuddy, *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self To Your Biggest Challenges* (Boston: Little Brown, 2015). See also Amy Cuddy, “Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are,” TED Talk, June 2012, [https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en).

In the third stanza, Rogers continues his focus on the viewer, in a kind of playful inversion of the standard relational dynamics of television, often conceived as a one-to-many communication medium. Indeed, it is Rogers, the “star” of the show who is supposed to be the focus of the enamored and distant home viewer, not the other way around. “I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you,” he sings, “I’ve always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.” Thus, the show is incomplete without the viewer’s acceptance of the invitation, stressing that mutuality is the rock on which the rest of the program unfolds.

Rogers begins each program by singing this song as he enters his “television home” through the front door. His face always displays a genuine smile and his voice projects a positive and pleasant tone. He is dressed in plain pants, a button-down shirt with a tie, and a men’s suit jacket. While he sings the opening song, he strives to maintain eye contact with the camera/ viewer as he removes his jacket, hangs it on a hanger in the closet a few feet away, and puts on a plain-colored cardigan sweater. He then sits down on a bench in his living room and changes out of his work shoes and into a pair of Keds. As the song comes to a close while Rogers finishes tying his shoes, he sings:

*Won’t you please,  
Won’t you please,  
Please won’t you be my neighbor?*

At this time, Rogers takes a moment to transition out of this “I and Thou” welcoming greeting by saying hello to the viewer and by introducing her to an object that he has brought with him. With this move, he replicates the most important event in the infant’s path to becoming socially viable by providing the viewer with a transitional object that will serve to foster the move from total dependency on mother into relative dependency

via engagement with the world. The child's interest in, manipulation of, and transformation of the object, in tandem with the development of a secure, trusting attachment relationship with mother and later dependable adults like Rogers, will serve to constitute her healthy and stable development. Rogers deploys this sequence that begins with relationship establishment/reestablishment and moves toward the examination of and play with an object in nearly every episode of *MRN*. The objects he brings with him to show the viewer serve as fodder for the show's anthropological conversations about artifacts, their transformative abilities when handled and examined by people, and their relationship to the social world of people and things.

In this chapter, I examine the primary rhetorical and aesthetic choices that Rogers made in creating the first year of the program. As we have discussed, Rogers' dialogic communication method establishes a unique sense of mutuality and togetherness that constitutes the communication culture of *MRN*. Having identified this important strategy of engagement, I now wish to examine the ways Rogers interweaves this anthropocentric, dialectical ethos with a meticulous study of objects, play, and the creation of social-material culture. A detailed look at each program that ran during the first year reveals that a consistent and ritualized emphasis on investigating the uses of everyday material objects, their social meanings, and their creative potentiality is central to the show's construction. Episode after episode begins with the introduction of an everyday object (e.g., a scale, a shoe, a stone, a painting) that is designed to prompt a thoughtful dialogical, social, and bodily investigation of its potential uses, transformative capacity, and various meanings.<sup>4</sup> The object thus becomes the starting point for the creative,

---

<sup>4</sup> See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of*

enacted and embodied unfolding of a culture and a people who constitute and occupy a small, manageable world called *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

In this chapter, I show that the program constitutes the representation of a culture's materiality that is organized by social principles that promote values of discovery, creativity, transformation, and growth at the levels of the material world, the social world that gives meaning to the material world, and the emotional and moral world of *MRN*. In the *Neighborhood*, the material object leads to the social, which includes the aesthetic, ethical, and emotional aspects of human life. This is to say that each object presented always exists and operates within a relational framework – no object exists by itself. From an anthropological perspective, this calls to mind the notion of Homo Faber, who, once he picks up the twig, places the twig into a complex fabric of human social relationships.

In the following few paragraphs, I provide a sequence of presentation for the chapter. I begin the chapter by detailing the structural shape of the episodes (i.e. “I-Thou” musical greeting and introduction of object; development of object in relation to Rogers and the viewer; further development of object with other actors; transition to fantasy world where object becomes part of a drama; return to Rogers' home; denouement). Here, I provide the kind of thick description necessary to acquire a detailed sense of the program – its characters, themes, and activities.

In the second section, I move towards an identification, examination, and analysis of the overarching characteristics of the first year of episodes. I discuss Rogers' emphasis

---

*Goods: Towards and Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Ronald J Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “Books, Reading, and the World of Goods in Antebellum New England,” *American Quarterly* 48.4 (1996): 587-622; and R. Zboray and M. Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Everyday New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

on the transformative and creative release that results from object-relations, and, more specifically, artisanal and artistic work. I investigate this object-oriented phenomena from the different perspectives of two primary scholars – the renowned twentieth-century child development psychologist, D.W. Winnicott and the prominent cultural theorist and philosopher of the postmodern Jean Baudrillard. Focusing on Winnicott's understanding of the formation of the healthy socialized person and Baudrillard's insights into the symbolic, material order and orderings of the postmodern age, respectively, help us to examine more fully Rogers' anthropology of the socio-material and the ethical framework he communicates.

Rogers deploys objects as vehicles to think about, discuss, and examine the structures of the socio-political and material world. He also uses them as venues for exploring and teaching the art of cultural creation, the value of individual action and empowerment, and the pleasurable creative uses of ordinary material objects. Always departing first from the dialogical social relationship he establishes with his viewer, Rogers ritually introduces a third– an object to play with, manipulate, and dialogically examine together. He first dialogues on various ideas that arise when assessing and thinking about the object. He then homes in on a particular idea and weaves this idea and its derivatives through a dialectic of social action and transaction.

Within the intimate social environment he creates with his viewer, Rogers is primarily interested in artifacts – how people make them, use them, and transform them. He identifies a thing and shows how human activity traverses the thing to make it into an object that has a relation to human beings. In doing so, he ties these object to their place



in the socius. His use of objects is constituted by activity and the creation and recreation of socio-material items by the work of human hands.

Rogers' emphasis on play and object relations, his variations on the object woven together by social activity and relationships, and his use of song to convey feeling and create secure attachment between him and the viewer, work in dialectical ways to produce an anthropocentric, safe, yet challenging world in which the child (and adult) viewer is encouraged to engage, on a cognitive, emotional, and social level with the questions, ideas, characters and narratives presented.

The research for this chapter involved the viewing of all one hundred thirty episodes of the first year of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The first year of *MRN* constitutes some of the most important work of the thirty-year running program. In it, Rogers constructed a framework for the show – a framework, which he and his team would sustain for over thirty years. I further employed Clifford Geertz's method of thick description<sup>5</sup> as a practice that fosters an anthropological approach for understanding and examining cultural phenomena. This chapter is rich with thick description of episodes, interwoven with critical observations and theoretical analysis. I also incorporate elements throughout the chapter of Erving Goffman's sociological phenomenology, Harold Garfinkle's ethnomethodology and audience autoethnography.<sup>6</sup>

In his chapter on television and ontology in *Television and Everyday Life*, Roger Silverstone notes the regularity and sequentiality of television programming and suggests

---

<sup>5</sup> See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 2-30; and Joseph Ponterotto, "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept, 'Thick Description,'" *Qualitative Report* 11.3 (2006): 538-49.

<sup>6</sup> See Alexander Dhoerst, "'If You Asked Me...': Exploring Autoethnography as Means to Critically Assess and Advance Audience Research," in *Revitalizing Audience Research: Innovations in European Audience Research*, ed. Frauke Zeller, Cristina Ponte, and Brian O'Neill (New York: Routledge, 2005).

that this phenomena may be a response to “the deeply felt needs of audiences and viewers for continuity.”<sup>7</sup> Rogers’ deep interest in producing culturally and educationally enriching programing, while simultaneously addressing the broader psychological needs of the young child, likely contributed to this sustaining framework of address as well. Writing in 1984, Silverstone notes how our essential human needs for this kind of continuity has been made more pressing in the postmodern era due to the “increasingly stressful or threatening world in which we live; a world which is, of course, for most of us only seen on television.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, he asserts, these needs are being “massaged” by the programs themselves as they are involved in the “creation and mediation of anxiety and its resolution.” Rogers’ structural framework, which is deployed in every episode from its first year until its last, certainly provides this sense of comforting continuity. My methodological approach of examination and analysis of the first year of programming was prompted by the need to establish a baseline of understanding of *MRN* as it emerged during its first year from which to assay later developments. It was during this first year that Rogers set the framework that the show would then follow and expand from for the next thirty plus years of its programming lifespan.

### **Architecture of the Program**

Let me begin by providing a broad description of the structural elements of each episode through the lens of one of the first programs from the first season. From here, I will offer more detailed examples of episodes from this season. These examples will provide the reader with a sense of the variety and redundancies of the program content, as

---

<sup>7</sup> Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

well as a sense of its presentation within a tight structural framework that provides the viewer with reliable continuity of characters, recurrence of general themes, persistent structure of feeling, consistent sense of pacing, and revisitation of spaces/places.

*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* begins with an instrumental opening of the song, *It's A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, played solo on celeste as the camera pans over a model neighborhood constructed of buildings, street signs, trees, and houses. After a few seconds, and prompted by a notable musical shift to a solo piano with dense syncopated chords and ascending glissandos, the camera partially zooms on to a view of one particular house, ostensibly that of Mister Rogers, and we zoom into the structure until eventually cutting to the inside set, which constitutes the interior of Rogers' home.<sup>9</sup> The camera pans the living room from right to left. We first see a picture frame, which we later learn plays films and affectionately anthropomorphized and named "Picture Picture." The frame has the word "Hi" written in large letters on the primary focal area. Underneath it is a small trolley that traverses train tracks in the same direction that the camera pans. Beneath the trolley is a worn-in, plaid couch. The camera follows the trolley as it moves from right to left, towards the front entrance of the house where Rogers enters through the wooden front door singing, "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, won't you be mine?" As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Rogers continues in song while changing out of his suit jacket and into a cardigan, which he

---

<sup>9</sup> In the accompanying music, the celeste and the piano begin to play a duet, suggesting symbolism in instruments that work to further convey the relational dance on the show. The celeste, an instrument more often than not featured in children's music, plays lighter, delicate tones in the middle and upper registers. In contrast the piano, which would seem to represent the adult figure of Rogers, has a fuller and grander presence, its lower register bass clef notes representing perhaps the deeper voice of an adult male creating a feeling of holding, stability, reliability, and protection. The two instruments, celeste and piano, coming together in a duet symbolize the meeting and dialogical intertwining of Rogers and the viewer, inviting a sense of mutuality and togetherness.

grabs off a hanger in the nearby coat closet. In the earlier episodes, Rogers enters his television home wearing blue Keds sneakers and thus does not engage in the later implemented transitional ritual of changing from formal shoes into more casual ones. In nearly every episode, after he closes the invitational song, Mister Rogers sits down on the bench and shows the viewer an object that he has brought with him.

In the fourth episode of the first season,<sup>10</sup> Rogers brings with him a blanket and a folding, wooden playpen, which he sets on the ground in the living room. He greets the viewer with a simple “Hi” and then proceeds to discuss the object with him/her. “Do you know what this is?” he asks. “Oh, I bet you played in one of these. Or you have a younger brother or sister who has.” Rogers’ first use of speech always emerges in a casual tone and tends to address the utilitarian function of the object, its social meaning/relevance, and sometimes, the transformational possibilities of the object. In the case of the crib, he places the blanket into it and says, “Wait until you see who is going to go in it.” He then goes to the front door and fetches a little Saint Bernard puppy, picks her up, and returns to the crib announcing, “Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like you to meet Lydia Stout.”<sup>11</sup> He then turns to the dog and says, “Lydia Stout, I’d like you to meet my friends.” Looking down at the crib with the puppy still in his arms he asks her if she might like to play in the pen. He pretends to listen to her and then tells the viewer, “Oh, she thinks it looks a little bit like a fence and she’s not too sure that she cares too much for fences.”

After such initial discussion on an object ensues, Rogers might explore its functions with a visiting neighbor, sing a song about the object, or explain how the object

---

<sup>10</sup> “Episode 0004,” *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, 22. Feb., 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Lydia Stout is the author of a 1958 *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled, “What Strangles American Teaching—The Certification Racket,” a topic that would likely appeal to Rogers.

is relevant in a current drama in the program's fantasy-play segment called the "Neighborhood of Make-Believe" (henceforth 'NMB'), which the program will then lead into. In the case of Episode 0004, he breaks into a song about the complexity and sometimes contradictory nature of our relationship to fences.

REFRAIN:

*Fences, fences  
The world is full of fences  
And some I like  
And some I don't  
Like the kind that keep me out*

*The kind that keep me out  
And the kind that make me pout  
They're the kind that have no gate at all  
They're the kind that go up much too tall*

REFRAIN

*The kind that keep me safe I say  
Are the kind that keep me [inaudible]  
They're the kind that help me drive my car  
So I never have to go far from*

REFRAIN

In the middle of the song, Rogers places the dog in the pen and the camera zooms in on her as she lies down. Rogers gets down on his knees so that he can pet the dog and continues to sing the song. "How many fences do you know about?" he asks the viewer at the end of the song. "Did you ever hide on the other side of a fence or do you ever just play hide and seek?" Without addressing the issues presented in the song, Rogers ensues in a game of hide and seek with the viewer. Though his song addresses the ways people might not like how fences inhibit their movement, it embraces the ways that it protects and keeps people safe. His speech after the song further point towards a positive familiarity with the fence and how it can be used by people to play amusing games. Here,

he addresses the contradictory feelings about fences from an indirect and nonverbal angle. He uses the fence for play, demonstrating that people have a choice in viewing the fence either positively or negatively. They can, as he demonstrates, choose to use the fence for pleasurable activities. Thus, the fence can have multiple meanings but we can chose to focus on its positive meanings and uses. Playing hide and seek with the viewer, he crouches down and sneaks out the front door. After a few seconds go by, he walks through the front door saying, "See, I came back. I always come back when I say I will," ensuring the viewer that he is trustworthy and signaling the game's end.

Structurally, after discussion of and play with an object takes place, Rogers is often greeted by a visit from a neighbor. In Episode 0004, a knock on the front door results in a brief visit by Rogers' mailman, Mr. McFeely (played by David Newell).<sup>12</sup> The Mr. McFeely character became a fixture on the program for its entire thirty-three year duration. McFeely's delivery provides an important transition from the dialogical environment of Rogers and the viewer (I and Thou) to a social situation that involves a third person from the outside world (i.e. the Neighborhood). McFeely, dressed in a postal uniform and conveying his usual urgency through a variety of verbal and nonverbal methods, delivers a box from the puppet, King Friday XIII, the sovereign leader of the

---

<sup>12</sup> The character of "Mr. McFeely" was named after Rogers' maternal grandfather, Fred Brooks McFeely, after whom Fred Rogers was named. Grandfather McFeely was very dear to Rogers, providing him with unconditional love, emotional support, and a sense of freedom. Rogers recalled his grandfather saying, in contrast with his mother's worry, that it would be "a good thing" for Fred to walk along a stone wall. "I climbed that wall," Rogers recounted, "And then I ran on it. I will never forget that day many years later" (Elaine Woo, "It's a Sad Day in This Neighborhood," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Feb., 2003, <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-fred-rogers-20030228-story.html>). Rogers' ritual assertions on *MRN*, which are now considered a hallmark of his program, that "You are special" and "You made this day a special day just for being you," illustrate McFeely's influence on him during his formative years. Rogers recalls his grandfather saying to him during his childhood, "Freddie, you make my day very special" (Kimmel and Collins, *The Wonder of It All*, 7). As Elaine Woo notes, "[Rogers'] signature line – 'I like you just the way you are' – was taken nearly verbatim from Grandfather McFeely" (Woo).

fantasy world, the “Neighborhood of Make Believe.” Thus, McFeely not only inserts himself as outsider into the social reality, but, via mention of the package and its sender, places King Friday’s imaginary presence into the mix through the utterance of his name and his relation to the package. In this moment, the package is used to prep the viewer for the impending segment that ensues in the “NMB,” a theatrical space where puppets and members of Rogers’ neighborhood engage with each other in a fantasy drama. Rogers, who serves both as the viewer’s adult playmate and simultaneously represents the viewing child himself, invites the viewer to imagine scenarios that take place in “Make Believe” just as the child does for imaginary play in his real, everyday life.

After saying goodbye to McFeely, who, Rogers notes rarely has the time to stay for a visit, Rogers sits down on bench with the package. He tells the viewer that King Friday must be feeling much better than he was yesterday if he is sending presents. Here, Rogers reminds the viewer of where they left off the previous day in the ‘NMB’ drama. He opens the package and finds an unusual looking clock, which he takes out and places next to him on the bench. Confused by the clock’s appearance and nature, Rogers comes to the conclusion that it is a punch clock and explains to the viewer that when some “ladies and men” go to work, they place a punch card under this type of clock and it punches the card with the time that they came and the time that they left.<sup>13</sup> As he proceeds to demonstrate the device, the camera zooms in on the card as Rogers advances it into the proper slot. Amused by the mechanical punch, he pulls the card out and then shows it to the viewer (the camera zooms in to reveal the printed time). He then punches

---

<sup>13</sup> “Punch clocks” hit at the heart of labor management relations, as pointed out in Tamara K. Haraven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 147.

the card a second time to reinforce the demonstration and proceeds to examine the workings of the clock by removing its cover.

Rogers often takes objects like these apart to examine their inner workings. In both his discussions about the object and his bodily engagement with it, events that take place nearly every episode, he performs this kind of an anthropological examination of everyday objects, exposing through the inner workings the social relations that produce commodities. Interested in both form and function, in addition to the object's social use and inner mechanical workings, Rogers counters commodity fetishism. After observing the various nobs and gears in the clock and pointing them out physically with his hands, he places the top back on and suggests to the viewer that she ask her mother or father if they ever had to use a punch clock in their workplace. Here, Rogers makes the social use of the object immediate and personal by relating it to a member of the viewer's family circle. He does this throughout the program, whether connecting the object to a neighbor, character in the "NMB," or to the viewer's imagined relations. In doing so, he extends the realm of his neighborhood to include several places and persons who cannot be seen through verbal utterance. Moreover, he creates a much-appreciated sense of continuity between the viewer's social and material world, his domestic space, his neighborhood outside the walls of his "television home," and the "NMB."

Patting the punch clock with his hand, Rogers says into the camera, "Why don't we thank King Friday for the present, ok?" Then, he rises up from the bench and heads across the room, where he picks up a tin can telephone that resides next to an old traffic light attached to a column. Sitting down at another bench, he asks "the operator" to connect him with "King Friday the Thirteenth." As he places the can around his ear, a



piano plays a series of loud chords in minor key. The notes serve to communicate the King's speech. Surprised and amused by the loudness of the greeting, Rogers moves the tin can "receiver" away from his ear. He then places the can in front of his mouth and says, "King Friday, I want to thank you for that punch clock." A piano plays a few, staccato, dissonant chords while Rogers listens to Friday's response through the tin can. Again placing it in front of his mouth, he says, "Oh, it isn't a present, it's an order. Why is it an order, King Friday?" Rogers learns through this "conversation" that King Friday has set up a system in the 'NMB' wherein everyone must punch in and out as they come and go.<sup>14</sup> This part of the program is, once again, used to build a communication bridge between the world that Rogers and his viewer have been occupying in Rogers' home and the world of the 'NMB.' As noted in the earlier chapters, the place of Rogers' home constitutes the space of "reality;" in contrast, the 'NMB' represents the space of "fantasy" and imaginative play where children work out their psychological and social conflicts. In Episode 0004, the 'NMB' segment continues a drama that began at the beginning of the week, in which King Friday has become concerned about the threat of war and continues to mobilize against any possible threat from a territory outside the "NMB."

Thus, the first segment of *MRN* episodes always involve Rogers, arriving at his home and greeting the viewer, and then introducing an object of which he examines and plays. This introductory portion, which involves an intimate dialogical social situation between Rogers and the viewer, shifts when a neighbor from outside visits the home. In this case, McFeely delivers another object, directly related to the "NMB," to Rogers'

---

<sup>14</sup> Just to be clear, the King does not voice a word in this first (invisible) appearance. The piano is intended to represent the King's speech, which Rogers understands but which the audience is not privy to in an explicit, linguistic way. We only are able to guess the gist of what the King is communicating to Rogers by listening to Rogers' responses.

home for examination and play. After the neighbor departs, the discourse often moves toward a topic that is directly related to the current situation in the 'NMB' in order to prep the viewer for the impending shift into this new visual and social space of the fantasy world.

In the early episodes of *MRN*, Rogers sometimes uses a telescope to provide a transition from his home to the 'NMB.' The camera zooms in on Rogers looking through a simple, wooden telescope pointed at the camera. He uses his fingers to adjust the focus as the screen becomes blurrier and blurrier, and eventually fades into the 'NMB.' "Do you see Daniel's Clock?" Rogers asks the viewer as the visual blurs into a white fog. We then fade into a shot of a tall yet round, one-dimensional grandfather clock likely made out of wood. Daniel Striped Tiger, a shy, child-like puppet resides inside it. "There it is," Rogers voice declares as we view the clock. "It looks alright to me." Behind the clock is a stone wall with ivy hanging down it. One-dimensional trees stand side by side each other far off in the background. The camera pans to the left, revealing a punch clock sitting atop a fountain. "Uh oh," Rogers says as the camera zooms in for a tighter shot of the punch clock, "there's a punch clock sitting right on the fountain." With this declaration, Rogers inserts his own skeptical attitude about Friday's punch clock orders causing the viewer, who has allied himself with the fatherly and trustworthy Rogers, to adopt a position of skepticism as well.<sup>15</sup>

The set of the 'NMB' is aesthetically composed alongside a curvy stone wall, alongside of which stands Daniel's clock, a stone fountain, a small carousel called the "Museum-Go-Round," a substantially large oak tree with a wide trunk and big canopy

---

<sup>15</sup> Read through a Freudian lens, Rogers appears to cast Friday in an aura of paternal authority, perhaps a symbol of a Freudian superego, in an unflattering light.

top, a machine with blinking lights, wheels, and gauges that constitute a rocking-chair factory, a large medieval castle complete with round towers, and a red, white, and blue model of the Eiffel Tower. Each structure represents the home of a 'NMB' puppet character. As mentioned, the shy and reticent Daniel Striped Tiger occupies the clock; Lady Elaine, an unattractive, red-nosed troublemaker resides at the Museum-Go-Round; X Owl, a wise and straight forward owl lives in the oak tree along with a timid and gentle kitten named Henrietta Pussycat; King Friday, the pompous, father-like, and cordial leader of the neighborhood resides, as one might expect, in the castle. His cook and border guard, Edgar Cooke, a meager, often worried, subservient servant, also appears to reside at the Castle. Finally, there is Grandpere, a mustached puppet who resembles Daniel Striped Tiger though he is dressed in a beret and painter's coat. Grandpere lives, as one also might expect, in the Eiffel Tower. These 'NMB' occupants are regularly visited by human characters, which traverse between Rogers' neighborhood and the "NMB." These human neighbors role-play as subjects under the leadership of the puppet King Friday. But their role is polysemic as they also appear to serve as trustworthy and in-control adults who, while playing along with the childlike puppets in their community dramas, usually serve as references and guides in helping the puppets work through their dramas. They also often intervene in contentious problems that arise among the 'NMB' puppets, using dialogue to guide group conversations toward reasonable compromises and positions. These human characters include, but are not limited to Lady Aberlin (Betty Aberlin in Rogers' neighborhood), a young motherly figure who is also King Friday's niece; Carol Saunders, a young African American teacher and musician; Francois Clemmons, a young African American singer who plays a police officer in Rogers'

neighborhood; Chef Brockett, a portly and jovial chef; Handyman Negri, a handyman, guitarist and singer; Judy Rubin, the “art lady,” Reardon (John), a musician.<sup>16</sup>

Continuing on into the ‘NMB’ segment of Episode 0004, the camera proceeds to pan across the set as Rogers’ voice narrates a search for other punch clocks. He and the camera discover one at the Museum-Go-Round and at X and Henrietta’s tree. “I wonder what they think about it,” Rogers says via voice-over. The camera continues on to reveal a punch clock at the factory and then arrives at the Castle, where the Neighborhood Trolley is rolling along the track in the direction of the tunnel that is, in later episodes, used to transition the viewer back to Rogers’ living room. Music imitative of the sounds made by a train rolling along tracks is played on the piano by *MRN* musical director Johnny Costa. This music is used in every episode as an audio cue signaling to the viewer that an environmental transition is about to occur. The camera then follows the trolley along the side of the castle and into the tunnel as Rogers’ says, “Well, there’s the trolley. We will see what’s going on when the trolley comes. Come on, Trolley!”

The scene cuts to Rogers, on his living room couch, telescope in hand awaiting Trolley’s arrival. Rogers asks Trolley if “he” has to punch in and out as well. Trolley indicates “yes” by shifting forward and back while a few musical notes are inserted to indicate Trolley’s affirmative response. “I thought so,” says Rogers. “Well, maybe you can take us right in so that we can hear people talk in the Neighborhood of Make Believe.” At this request, Trolley heads back in the direction he came and the train track music ensues.

---

<sup>16</sup> Note that the human characters listed here are those who appeared in episodes from the first season. There were over one hundred who appeared over the course of the thirty-three year run of the program. Some became fixtures over the years and some did not. It should also be noted that, like Rogers, all of these human characters use their real-life names.

Sometimes, Rogers will transition out of the ‘NMB’ in order to touch base with his viewer and help them understand the situation by articulating items he wishes to emphasize. This move also allows for Rogers to reaffirm to the child viewer that he is keeping an eye on the situation, just as a trustworthy adult would make himself available and accessible to a child when she is off on her own in imaginative play. This move also offers the viewer a break so that she can step back and process all or some of the main elements of the situation and storyline. In this case, everyday life in the ‘NMB’ has been altered due to the insertion of punch clocks that seek to account for residents’ movements within the territory. Rogers conducts a kind of interview with Trolley, asking “him” to provide us a first person observation of the situation. His interaction with the Trolley also serves to reestablish the connection between Rogers, in his living room, and the “NMB,” once again creating a sense of continuity between the different segments and their respective environments but also clearly demarcating the separate worlds of reality and fantasy play for the child, as discussed in Rogers’ “Philosophy” document.

As we fade back into the “NMB,” the camera zooms out from a tight shot of the grandfather clock hand to reveal Handyman Negri hammering the punch clock into the larger clock, with Daniel looking on. Daniel expresses confusion about why the object needs to be nailed into his clock (home). Negri clarifies for him that the reason why he is setting up the clock is because King Friday has ordered the action. “King’s orders,” he tells Daniel.<sup>17</sup> Everyone in the ‘NMB’ must punch in when he arrives and out when he

---

<sup>17</sup> A political system of absolute power reigns in “Neighborhood of Make Believe.” King Friday is the sovereign power and all other human and puppet characters are subjects in his polis. They behave accordingly by addressing him as the supreme authority. However, the characters in the neighborhood are portrayed as more likable than Friday, and more often than not, their ideas are often wiser than his. They are often shown negotiating with a stubborn but amenable Friday to help him see their perspective on a matter. Indeed, when Friday listens to his subjects, which he almost always does, he quite often changes his mind on a subject and alters his approach to accommodate the concerns of “his people.” In this way, he

leaves his residence. Negri and Daniel playfully improvise a song about how funny it is that he has installed a clock on a clock. Next, McFeely arrives on his bike with a package that Negri must sign for. It is another punch clock, the last one that Handyman Negri must install. Negri bids farewell to Daniel and walks towards the Castle where he is greeted by puppet Edgar Cooke, who, dressed as a Castle guard, sings/speaks to him in libretto-like stanzas. Negri tells him that he is about to install the final punch clock and quickly bids him farewell. We then follow Negri to the Eiffel Tower, where he is met by Grandpere. Grandpere greets Negri in both French and English. After that, however, he only responds to Negri's cordial questions in French.<sup>18</sup> Negri informs Grandpere that he must install a punch clock at the Eiffel Tower. Confused as to what the object is, Grandpere questions the meaning of the word "punch." Negri replies with a hand movement of a fist punching the air.

"A punch," he says as he punches into the air.

"Punch?" Grandpere responds.

"Yes," Negri says holding up the clock before Grandpere. "This is a punch clock.

"And you punch the clock?" Grandpere asks.

"That's right; you punch the clock when you come in and you punch the clock when you go out."

Grandpere confirms that he has understood in French. Then, he takes a swing at the clock, nearly knocking it out of Negri's hands. The gesture is playful, but also physically and emotionally violent. Grandpere is clearly rejecting, with palpable irritation, the installation of the clock on his "property." "Piano, easy," Negri says. Grandpere understands that this means that he should punch the clock in the same way but with less

---

could be read as an authoritative, yet approachable, father figure, who exerts power and management but who also is amenable to conversation, arbitration, and compromise.

<sup>18</sup> Notably, there are no French subtitles, nor is there an oral translation for the viewer.

force and does so. “You *punch* the clock when you’re coming in,” he says softly punching the clock face with his fist. “And you *punch* the clock when you’re going out,” he says punching it again. More comical interactions ensue while Negri explains the function of the card and Grandpere proceeds to punch the card with his fist. Negri laughs. The scene is playful, whimsical, and humorous. “Oh, I adore the punch clock!” Grandpere says as Negri attempts to install it on the face of the Eiffel Tower. He has, in his misunderstanding of the term, made new meaning of the object. And this new meaning transforms the serious air of concern surrounding the clock installations. Grandpere has, in effect, subverted the social atmosphere that arose as a result of Friday’s concerned order.

Finally, Grandpere spots the Trolley coming around the bend in front of the castle and insists that Negri show Trolley the object before he fixes it to the Eiffel Tower face. Negri stops the Trolley with a greeting, approaches it, and shows “him” the punch clock up-close. “Have you seen the new punch clock?” he asks Trolley. Trolley responds with musical notes intended to represent his communications. “This is Grandpere’s punch clock,” Negri tells Trolley. “Try to punch it, Trolley,” calls Grandpere from the Tower. “Oh, Trolley doesn’t want to punch it,” Negri tells Grandpere. “I’m going back to put it up on the Eiffel Tower, okay Trolley? Bye Trolley.”

With that final goodbye, the camera follows Negri as he moves back towards the Tower and chats with Grandpere while installing the clock on the structure. We see the Trolley making its way through the tunnel just behind Negri and cut to a shot of Rogers, sitting on his couch, smiling and holding the telescope that first helped us transition into the “NMB.”

This return to Rogers' home marks the final segment of the program. It usually involves Rogers summarizing, synthesizing, and/or expanding on the activities in the "NMB." Encouraging further thinking on the subject and its meanings, Rogers creates space for his viewers to make connections and ponder different angles both with him and on their own. In the case of Episode 0004, Rogers looks into the camera with a sly smile and turns the telescope around with his hands. The celeste plays a variety of dreamlike notes. He is thinking and prompts viewer curiosity about his thoughts with his smiling gaze – as if he is amused but bashful about sharing that which he is thinking. "Well, some people are having a fun time with the King's serious business," he says. He sort of mocks the King's punch clock agenda when delivering the line "King's serious business," aligning himself with the playful acts of Grandpere. He laughs while describing how Grandpere misunderstands the function of the punch clock. He then notes with pleasure how Daniel made up "little rhymes" about the clock and repeats them to the viewer – "the clock on the clock." "You could make up rhymes about anything," he tells the viewer while offering up a few examples. His message is that there are creative and fun ways to deal with the confusion and possible angst that result from changes enacted by authority figures.

At this moment, a doorbell rings and Rogers heads to the back door to greet a group multiracial young boys, followed by a young African-American woman with a classical guitar. He greets the white boy as "Rich," the two black boys as "Titi" and "Kevin," and the woman as Mrs. Saunders. He shakes each of their hands and asks them to have a seat at his kitchen table. "We've been having punch clock trouble; well, not all trouble, we've been even having some fun with it." Rogers also notes that he was playing



some Hide and Seek earlier. Mrs. Saunders tells Rogers that they too have been playing and that they have a song for Mister Rogers. The song is “Where is Thumbkin?” and involves giving names to each finger on the hand while showing them with one’s body. Prior to showing the fingers when the song calls for it, participants are to hide their hands behind their backs, which Rogers notes is a little bit like Hide and Seek. They sing the song with the hand actions for a minute or so. Next, they sing a song about birds, “Little Bird, Little Bird,” in which they use their hands to mimic the animal with its wings in flight.

*Blue bird, blue bird fly through my window (3x)*

*Buy molasses candy.*

*Fly through my window, little turtle dove (3x)*

*And buy molasses candy.*

*Red bird, red bird, fly through my window (3x)*

*And buy molasses candy.*

*Yellow bird, yellow bird, fly through my window (3x)*

*And buy molasses candy.*

The boys look to Rogers to mimic his bird-flying hand gestures, which he makes dynamic by moving them into each boy’s space and interacting with their “bird hands.” After the song concludes, Mrs. Saunders notes how enjoyable singing together was and Rogers agrees. She announces that they will now have to leave, followed by Rogers’ insistence that they must punch clock when they depart. At the living room bench, each boy takes a card and inserts it into the punch clock, one by one. Afterwards, Rogers leads them to the front door as he says goodbye to each by name as they exit his home.

“Mighty special people,” Rogers says into the camera as he makes his way to the playpen in the living room. “Let’s see how Lydia is.” He pets her in the playpen and asks if she is “about ready to go now.” He then tells the viewer that it is time for everyone to go and reassures the viewer that they will see each other tomorrow. Unzipping his

cardigan and walking towards the closet he begins to sing, “Tomorrow,” accompanied by Costa’s piano playing. Rogers sings this song while he changes back into his suit jacket, lifts Lydia out of her playpen, and announces that they now have to punch out. “A card for you and a card for Mister Rogers,” he says while punching each card. “Just like King Friday says,” he continues with a sigh and a disapproving glance at the viewer. He exits through the front door and we cut to a close-up on the exterior of his model house as it is situated on a street lined with bushes and trees. The camera then pans away, offering the viewer with a broader perspective on the neighborhood as the camera zooms out and moves through the community in the opposite direction of the beginning sequence.

The architecture of the program thus revolves around a sequencing that begins at Rogers’ home, where both he and the viewer both “arrive” and begin their visit with each other around a mutual greeting, followed by a dialogue that emerges from the introduction of an object. Use of and play with the object follow from the discussion and soon the dialogical social situation is transformed by the addition of a neighbor. If this neighbor does not present himself at Rogers’ home, then Rogers will go outside his home to visit neighbors in their own home or work space. Next, the viewer is transported via reference to the object and its future appearance in the fantasy world of the “NMB,” where a drama ensues between the object and the characters, cued by a verbal setting-up of the scene by Rogers. This fantasy world is ostensibly that of Rogers, who imagines people that he knows from his own neighborhood, e.g. Betty Aberlin and Joe Negri, interacting with imaginary puppet characters that he has conceived of in his mind. The viewer is thus subtly encouraged to think of Rogers as an adult interested in play and pretend. In this way, he presents himself as empathic towards the viewer in the sense that

he appears to have some understanding, an understanding that many adults do not have, of the things that concern children. And yet he is also clearly a responsible, trustworthy, and dependable adult who can be relied upon to lead the child through a variety of settings.

Sometimes, as in the case of Episode 0004, Rogers will interrupt the ‘NMB’ segment and return the viewer to his living room set, where he inserts commentary on the current happenings in the ‘NMB.’ If this is the case, such interruption will be rather brief – a minute or two – before he returns the viewer to the situation at hand in the “NMB.” Finally, the viewer returns once again to Rogers in his living room set, where Rogers concludes the program with more commentary on the ‘NMB’ that usually includes references of the transitional object that initially bridged the distance between his home and the ‘NMB.’ During this segment, the episode returns full circle with social and pedagogical transformation having taken place via the object’s travels to different social worlds, wherein people ascribed it with meaning. Thus, we can think of the architecture of the program in the form of an A (home), B (NMB), A (home again) sequencing, although not always fixed as such. Often, in fact, after the initial greeting in the home and the introduction of an object, Rogers will either show the viewer a film about the origins of the object or travel outside into the neighborhood to a location where more about the object’s origins and workings can be learned (e.g. a shoe store, an auto repair shop, an artisan’s workplace, a luncheon restaurant).

In regards to the presentational elements of *MRN*, Rogers performs a kind of mimesis of improvisation. That is to say that the show feels unplanned, as if one is simply spending time with Rogers at his house in the same way one might spend time at the

home of a neighbor one morning or afternoon.<sup>19</sup> This contributes to its everyday-life aesthetic and its general charm. In this way, the program feels unpretentious, devoid of the glitz or glamour that electronic media tends to produce, friendly, and intimate. The actors do not appear to be delivering exact lines, which adds to the feeling of the program having a kind of “natural,” or “organic” social flow. But, in fact, the program is very planned, as exemplified by the correlational scripts stored at the Fred Rogers’ Archive.

Let us now take a brief foray into the production of *MRN*. According to producer Hedda Sharapan, from 1967-1975 the pattern for *MRN* production took on the following trajectory.<sup>20</sup> Rogers wrote all of the scripts over the summer. At the end of September the team would begin production and continue until around May. The schedule followed a four-day-per week taping pattern, completing some 65 programs per year during this eight-year period. “The advantage of children’s programming,” Sharapan notes in reference to the eventual re-airing of episodes, “is that children grow into it and grow out of it. We used to say if a child is seeing the same program six months later or a year later, that child is bringing new things to it and learning new things from it.” When the team would receive the scripts at the beginning of each taping period, the production team would sit down with the art crew (e.g., the props manager [David Newell] and set designers) and they would go through the scripts with Rogers to see what props and other set needs the program called for. Rogers would prescribe what he wanted and a week later the team would bring in the props and other set pieces.

---

<sup>19</sup> Recall that Rogers always referred to his program as a “television visit,” not a “show.”

<sup>20</sup> The following account of the various details of *MRN* film production are from a phone conversation between the author and longtime lead *MRN* producer, Hedda Sharapan, 20 Mar., 2016.

The next step involved the creation of field trips. These are segments in which the ‘Picture Picture’ device would visually transport the viewer from Rogers “television house” to another “real world” place, e.g. a factory, restaurant, business, public space. Generally, these segments were narrated by Mister Rogers or Mister McFeely and, says Sharapan, there would be an established time frame for the completion of this segment.

Next, the team would do the segments that required the assemblage of an extra set in the studio, e.g., a visit to the neighborhood bakery or to the neighborhood music shot, etc. The taping of this segment would take one week because, according to Sharapan, the team had to construct this setup in the studio. This was followed by the taping of the ‘Neighborhood of Make Believe’ segment the next week. The studio set would be rebuilt for the taping of this segment and then it would be taken down.

Rogers and his team developed set timing for each of the segments of the program. For example, notes Sharapan, “there would be the beginning, you had the introduction to Make Believe, then you had coming out of Make Believe.” Each of these segments had to meet their allotted time limit and Rogers had cue cards, later a teleprompter, to cue him for his line delivery. However, much of the speech that takes place in Rogers’ “television house” and in and around the “neighborhood” were not highly scripted. “There was no specific dialogue,” notes Sharapan. For example, in a now-famous episode in which Rogers dialogues with a young boy in a wheelchair named Jeff Erlanger, Sharapan recalls that “Fred said: I’ll ask you why you need a wheelchair and then maybe we’ll sing one of the songs together.” In a script from a week about play, Sharapan notes (looking at the script) that the only scripted lines for the beginning until Rogers arrives at ‘Make Believe’ are: “I brought something to show you but I left it on

the porch swing. Do you have any idea what it might be?” The script is thus structured primarily via a third person narrative that describes the actions that are to ensue between the characters during each segment. Sharapan notes that Rogers, who was the sole writer of the scripts, revised them several times before arriving at a finished product and asserts that “he knew what he wanted to convey.”

Although the segments that take place in Rogers’ television house” and surrounding neighborhood were not highly scripted, the ‘NMB’ was. Here, Rogers and other puppeteers functioned behind the set pieces, manipulating various puppets. Sharapan, operated a puppet for a while, describes the puppeteering actions noting that one would sit on a stool behind, for example, behind the set piece. Taped in front of her was the script, next to which was a 3 to 4 inch television monitor which would allow the puppeteer to see the movements of the puppet she was manipulating. Sharapan notes that one of the primary reasons why the ‘NMB’ segment was highly scripted is because here, this segment had actors – e.g. Betty Aberlin, who played Lady Aberlin, Joe Negri, who played Handyman Negri, and Don Brockett, who played Chef Brockett. “But they weren’t child development specialists,” Sharapan says, “and Fred wanted to tell a story in a certain way through the puppets and so that needed to be tightly scripted.”

In regards to the introductory segment of the program, in which Mister Rogers enters his television house singing, “It’s a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” many have noted that Rogers and the program’s musical director, Johnny Costa, performed this piece live and anew at the start of every taping. This was unique, as the music in most television programs of the time was not performed live. Costa’s musical genius and personal importance to the program was so valued that after he died in 1996, Rogers

decided to use Costa's recorded piano music underneath his singing during the "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" introductory segment. "It was remarkable how Fred and Johnny connected in the studio," Sharapan notes. "Johnny would just noodle under to give him a key for the song. They were so in sync with each other." Costa was an improvisational jazz pianist, who rarely played *MRN* songs the same way every time, and whose live musical performances throughout the programming communicate a playful spontaneity that further lend to the natural and conversational feel of the program itself. Now that we have a better sense of the film production involved in the making of *MRN*, let us now move toward an analysis of the program's rhetorical construction and enactment.

### ***MRN*, Object Usage, and the World of Reality-Making**

One of the most prominent characteristics of the *Neighborhood* is the everyday performance of reality-making that Rogers practices by way of connecting the word, the body, the eye, and the object during a thirty-minute enactment. How does this enactment of place, practice, and meaning take shape and unfold on *MRN*? In this section, I apply the relevant critical perspectives of Winnicott and Baudrillard to Rogers' treatment of objects on *MRN*.

First, I address Rogers' ritual use of objects from the lens of D.W. Winnicott's understanding of object usage, play, creativity, and child development. Winnicott's groundbreaking work, which Rogers studied as a student of Margaret McFarland, appears to greatly inform his treatment of objects on *MRN*. Winnicott asserts that playing, which is inherently object-related and thus inherently dualistic, is the touchstone for the

emergence into a life of health and vitality.<sup>21</sup> Rogers begins every episode with the introduction of an object that will be examined, dissected, and transformed materially and socially (played with) in various contexts over the course of the program.

Next, I address the aesthetic and rhetorical meaning of Rogers' use of objects from the theoretical perspectives of Jean Baudrillard. For Rogers, an object is an inert thing. Only until one learns how to use it, how it is made, and its possible functions can one establish a mutual relationship with it. That is to say that the object acquires meaning in the human world when the human creates it, transforms it, and thus gives it social, creative, and material value. In this regard, I contend that Rogers' conception and treatment of objects is both anti-glamour and anti-idolatry,<sup>22</sup> to use Baudrillard's terms – both rising phenomena within the emergent postmodern, mass mediated cultural moment of the period. According to Baudrillard, the postmodern glamorous object is constituted not by what the human does with the object, but rather by the human gaze. Within the glamour paradigm, the object is invested with layers of capital that make it desirable. It is abstracted from its passion. Whether he intends to or not, Rogers' creative and embodied treatment of material objects performs an act of resistance to emerging advertising, glamour-based branding practices that work as part of a new system of commodification central to advanced capitalist American society.

In *Making Sense of Reality* (2014), Tia DeNora notes that the everyday is “the site where experience is made manifest, where it takes shape, and where sense is made.”<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Steven Tuber, *Attachment, Play, and Authenticity: A Winnicott Primer* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2008), 119.

<sup>22</sup> It also hints at a position of anti-commodity fetishism.

<sup>23</sup> Tia DeNora, *Making Sense of Reality: Culture and Perception in Everyday Life* (London: Sage, 2014), xx.



Rogers performs this process for his young viewers on *MRN* keeping at the forefront an advanced understanding of children's deeper psychological needs of healthy attachment, object relations, play and fantasy. Choosing the space most familiar to the very young child as his primary set – the home, Rogers engages in everyday reality making drawn from an engagement with objects, tools, sensory and aesthetic media, and his social environment in order to foster a “healthy” acclamation to the world in the young.<sup>24</sup> It is in this setting of the everyday where, according to DeNora, “realities are brought into being and into focus in ways that matter – to us.”<sup>25</sup> In *MRN*, Rogers creates a representational space composed of a simple, unadorned, plain midcentury home.

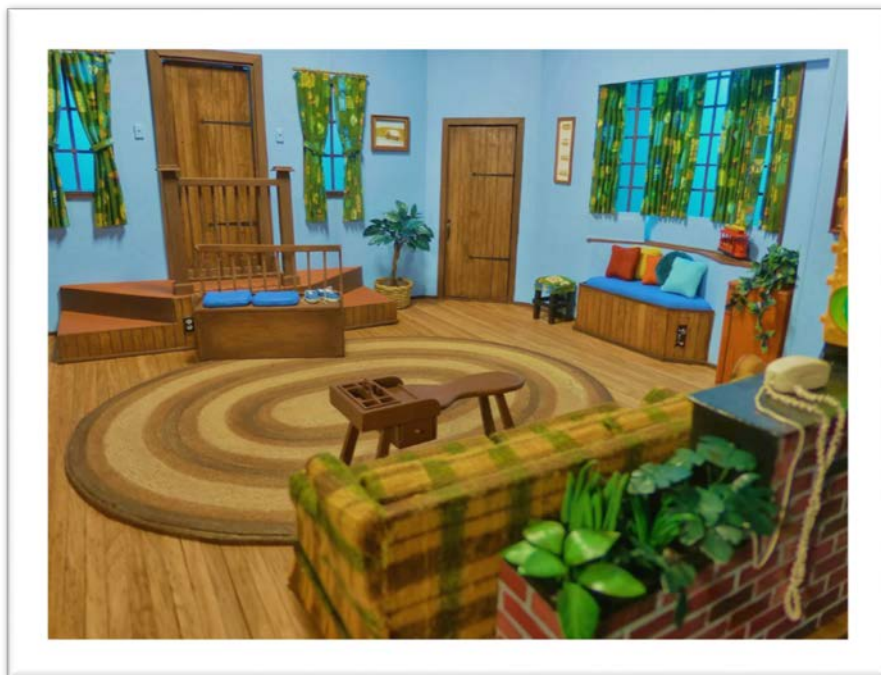
The simplicity of the set, with its basic pieces of functional 1950s furniture, its early America inspired mid-century, Cape Cod, streamlined stylings, complete with knotty pine wall paneling, communicates Rogers' values of anti-consumption, simplicity, austerity, thrift, and moderation. It also points to a Colonial Revivalism that mythologizes and romanticizes the pre-industrial world, as noted by Marilyn Casto in her essay, “The Concept of Hand Production in Colonial Revival Interiors.”<sup>26</sup>

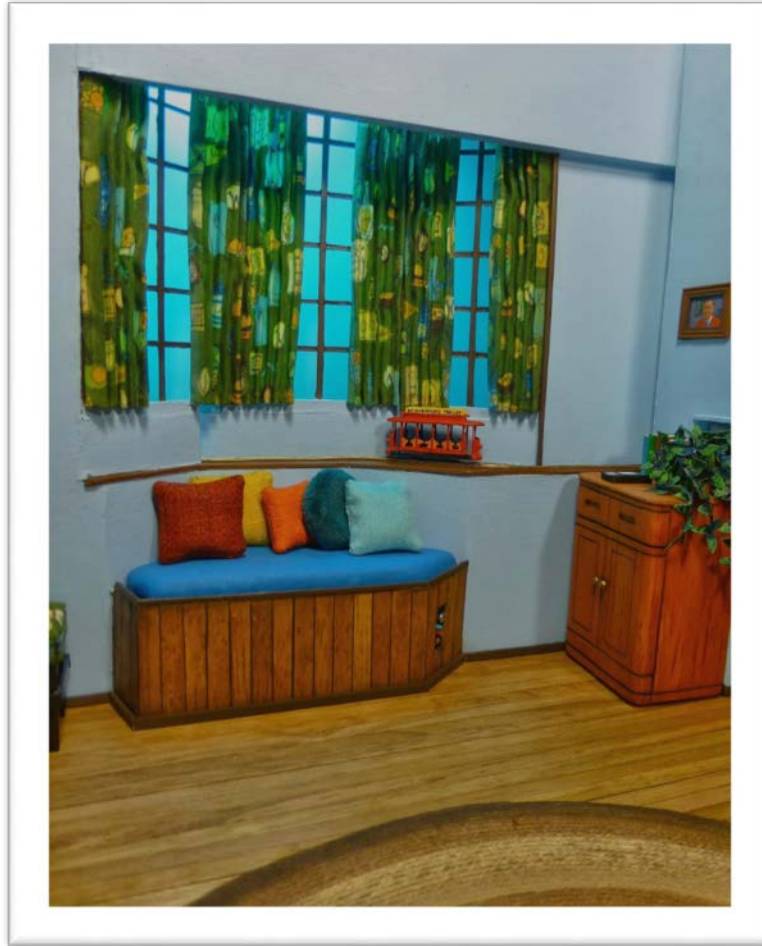
---

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that Rogers sees himself in dialogue not just with the very young, who are the primary audience for his program. Rather, he understands that because his communication channel is located in the home space, the program addresses the family at large and thus an intergenerational audience. This phenomena is further illustrated by the intergenerational diversity in the viewer mail.

<sup>25</sup> DeNora, xxiii.

<sup>26</sup> See Marilyn Casto, “The Concept of Hand Production in Colonial Revival Interiors,” in *Re-creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival*, ed. Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 321-25.





Figures 1-3. Lance Cardinal, “Mister Rogers’ Television House Miniature,” <http://lancecardinal.blogspot.com/2014/03/mr-rogers-neighborhood-tv-set-miniature.html>. These three images are recreations of the interior of Rogers’ television home.

It is here, in this unadorned, uncluttered, and simply fashioned aesthetic environment where Rogers meets with his viewer to play, ponder, socialize, connect, and work through problems. Notably, the *MRN* set is similar in its stylistic simplicity to several other prominent television programs of the period. Lean sets for domestic spaces were common in early television reaching into the 1970s. So, too, were Colonial Revival interiors (e.g. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* [1952-65]; *The Donna Reed Show* [1958-66]; *Father Knows Best* [1954-58]; and *Leave It to Beaver* [1957-63]. Thus, the

*MRN* set, while complimenting Rogers' general ethos of simplicity and manageability, follows longstanding set conventions. However, Rogers deliberately "kiddifies" his set, which mirrors the aesthetics of adult programming of the period more so than the aesthetics of children's programming, with the displays of the traffic light, the trolley, and the train tracks. These moves disrupt the conventional domestic visual field expectations while at the same time conveying a dominant aesthetic connotative of adult space. As such, the child is welcomed into the adult space through the display of toylike artifacts, but the adult aesthetic predominates, communicating to the child that the usual social expectations apply – as opposed to other children's programming, e.g., *Howdy Doody*, in which children are prompted to behave in an "off the wall" fashion prompted by a message that the usual rules do not apply.

In Episode 0035, Rogers enters his "television home" per usual, singing "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood, would you be mine?" In his hand is what appears to be a thin, square wooden cut-out. He places this piece of wood on the bench, as he does every object that brings with him at the beginning of each show, and walks to the closet while singing the welcoming greeting song. He then changes out of his suit jacket and into a buttoned cardigan sweater and returns to the site of the bench while concluding the song. Bringing attention to his sweater, he asks the viewer if he knows of anyone who buttons only a few of the buttons on his sweater, while unbuttoning a button. "I think I'll button three – this one, this one, and this one clear down here," he says as he points at each one. In a casual way, he alludes to the viewer that there is no absolute way to go about buttoning your sweater.

Next, grabbing the square piece of wood from the bench, as well as a mesh bag containing wooden blocks, and taking them over to a wooden table and chair in the center of the room, he tells the viewer that he has just returned from the neighborhood lumber yard. Sitting down in the chair, he explains that while there, he collected some scraps of wood, along with a “great big piece of wood,” each of which he holds up in accordance with his verbal utterance of the respective object. He tells the viewer that he wanted to do some hammering, nailing, and pounding. Placing aside a nail box already lying on the table, he sets his square block of wood onto it and asks the viewer what tool he needs in order to pound the nails into the wood. As he says “pound the nails into the wood,” he makes a gesture of pounding nails into an object with his right hand, visually reinforcing the meaning of his utterance with the correlating non-verbal, bodily message like he did earlier when discussing sweater buttons.

As if hearing the viewer answer the question, “hammer,” he gets up and walks toward the bench behind him saying, “alright, there’s one right back here.” Reaching into a drawer by the bench below the train tracks, he pulls out a hammer, utters its name casually and returns to the chair. There, he sorts through his nail box looking for the right size nail, pointing out the variety in nail sizes out loud. He grabs a big nail, places it in the center of the wood slab, and sets it in the proper position to be hammered, saying, “that’s a big daddy nail.” “Ready to pound it in?” he says looking into the camera. He then hits the nail four times with the hammer until it is firmly secured into the wood. He looks into the camera with a relaxed smile that communicates satisfaction. He continues by grabbing another slightly smaller nail from the nail box and hammering it in just beside the larger one. “Mother nail,” he declares before pounding it in. “We’ll put a

whole family of nails in here.” Grabbing another slightly smaller nail, he says, “that’s a great big sister” and pounds it right beside the “mother nail.” Pounding in yet another slightly smaller nail beside the “sister nail,” he says looking at it, “that might be a brother nail.” The sequence continues as he pounds in “another brother” and then proceeds to “do some more hammering just for fun.” “Do you ever hammer just for fun?” he asks the viewer. “Who does most of the hammering in your house? Your dad? I know a lot boys who would like to be just exactly like their dads.” From here, Rogers transitions into a song entitled, “I’d Like to be Just Like Dad.”

What has Rogers done in this beginning sequence? First, he gestures toward the manipulation of an object by commenting on his own act of buttoning his sweater, which he does at the beginning of every episode after donning it. Rogers does not offer a fixed directive on how to properly button one’s sweater. Instead, emphasizing the agency and freedom of the individual, he notes how some people button just a few buttons and demonstrates this by selecting which buttons he will button for today’s visit. In addition, Rogers’ short moment of discussing buttoning alludes to the forthcoming session on hammering, nailing, and pounding. Both acts involve connecting one material with a different material in order to make a whole new object.

In demonstrating hammering a nail into a piece of wood, Rogers playfully imagines that he is creating a family of nails and proceeds to identify one as father, another as mother, and so on according to height. After bringing this absent social reality (i.e., members of the family) into his activity, Rogers creates a further social and personal connection among himself, the object-centered action, and the viewer by asking the viewer who, in her family, does the majority of hammering. He then slowly breaks into a

song about a child wanting to be just like his father, the spouse most likely to engage in the domestic task of hammering nails. As the camera pans around him, Rogers looks into it and sings the gentle but uplifting song, “I’d Like to Be Just Like My Dad.”

*I’d like to be just like my dad  
He’s handsome and he’s keen  
He knows just how to drive the car  
And buy the gasoline  
And mommy likes the things he does  
The way he looks and Gee!  
I’d like to be just like my dad and have someone like me*

After pounding another nail into the wood slab,<sup>27</sup> Rogers declares that he will now use the scraps, which he lifts onto his lap, to make something. He looks at the three small pieces of wood in his hands, shows them to the viewer, and then asks “what would you make with three pieces of wood like this?”

Highlighting that such objects for playing can be obtained without charge, Rogers declares, “The man at the lumber yard just gave them to me.” He then sets them on top of each other to form a small pyramid. Shifting the blocks around, he shows how placing two in opposite directions and on top of each other can look like an airplane. Gliding the newly formed plane in the air, he makes a whistling noise with his mouth to vocalize the sound of flying. Pleased with his airplane idea, he decides to make this creation more permanent by nailing the two pieces of wood together. Once again, he glides and spins the object around in the air. “Now,” he continues, “let’s turn the airplane into a boat.” He turns the top piece of wood around so that it now rests parallel to the bottom piece and nails the smaller, third piece of wood to the top, back end of the object. “How’s that for a boat?” he asks the viewer, displaying his new creation in his hand. “Would you like to

---

<sup>27</sup> This is an obvious Freudian dream symbol for sexual intercourse—i.e., the family is created through the procreative act.

sail into the kitchen?” He rises and proceeds to “sail” the boat into the kitchen. There, he fills up the sink, asks the viewer if she likes to watch the faucet stream water into the sink, and watches as the water rises while the celeste plays gentle, happy background music. Turning off the water, he gently places the boat in the water asking, “Is it going to float?” The camera zooms in on the sink. “It does!” he gently exclaims. “It’s fun to make believe, isn’t it?” he asks. “Speaking of make believe, let’s just float into the other room and see if it’s almost time to go into the ‘Neighborhood of Make-Believe.’”

### **Winnicott, Objects, and the Location of Culture**

Let me pause here in recounting this episode so that I may address this example of object relations and play on *MRN* through the lens of Donald Woods Winnicott. Without going too deeply into Winnicott’s theories on the baby, its critical relationship to mother, and the developmental steps it must take during the first year of life, I would like to begin our discussion on object relations, play, and cultural experience by summarizing Winnicott’s primary ideas on these matters. Winnicott posits that at a particular stage of early development, the infant, who for a while after her birth conceives of herself as part of the mother, must take a symbolic journey “from the experience of her mother’s adaptation to her needs” at the time of her total dependence on her, toward a place of relative dependence.<sup>28</sup> In relative dependence, she begins to view her mother as not herself and comes to the conclusion that she must hold her own and exert her own agency. It is through the adoption of an external object, which Winnicott names the “transitional object,” that the symbolic journey from total dependency on mother toward

---

<sup>28</sup> Jan Abram, “Transitional Phenomena,” in *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott’s Use of Words* (London: Karnac Books, 1996), 313.



relative dependence is made. Though the transitional object represents many of the elements of mother, e.g. comfort and security, the event also importantly signifies the critical importance of “the infant’s ability to *create* what he needs.” This creational act is key to the resulting sense of confidence and agency that the child develops. The transitional object “truly belongs to him, because he has created it” writes Jan Abrams, a Winnicott scholar.<sup>29</sup>

In the common postwar parlance on parenting, the most prominent example of the transitional object is the “security blanket.” The infant asserts naming privileges over the object, assumes rights over it, and “affectionately” cuddles, “excitedly” loves, and mutilates it.”<sup>30</sup> Here, cuddling and loving refers to the calm and excited inner states in relation to his mother. Although language acquisition is important during this stage, Winnicott notes the act of naming in regards to agency and the creation of a personal word. Interestingly, he notes that the transitional object does not need to be an actual material object. It can be a word, melody, song, or a mannerism which becomes “vitally important...for use at the time of going to sleep, and is a defence against anxiety.”<sup>31</sup> The creation of this transitional object is the first reparation that the child makes; it is an ego-attempt to maintain his continuity of being while mother is away. He substitutes the special object for the mother, or mothering person.<sup>32</sup>

According to Winnicott, during this stage of human development, the infant struggles internally with the experience of the object-mother, who he “excitedly” loves, and his “environment-mother,” who provides calm and quiet moments. Winnicott reads

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Abram, “Transitional Objects,” 233.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>32</sup> Tuber, *Attachment, Play, and Authenticity*, 153.

this use of the object by the infant, via enactment, as a way of relating to these two mothers and trying to bring the two together. This concept of bringing together the two worlds is an important concept that we will return to again. The fate of the transitional object in regards to the child is gradual decathecting such that it is neither forgotten nor mourned, but rather relegated to limbo, where it loses meaning. This decathecting and loss of meaning occurs because over time transitional phenomena in general “have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between ‘inner psychic reality’ and ‘the external world as perceived by two persons in common,’ that is to say, over the whole cultural field.”<sup>33</sup> By this time, the young child is capable of distinguishing between Me and Not-me due to the work he did with the transitional object. Further, he can now live in this third, intermediate area of experience, a term coined by Winnicott, where he keeps inside and outside apart but still inter-related.<sup>34</sup> In his Winnicott Primer, *Attachment, Play, and Authenticity*, Steven Tuber describes Winnicott’s third, intermediate area of experience as the overlapping space in a venn diagram, as shown below.

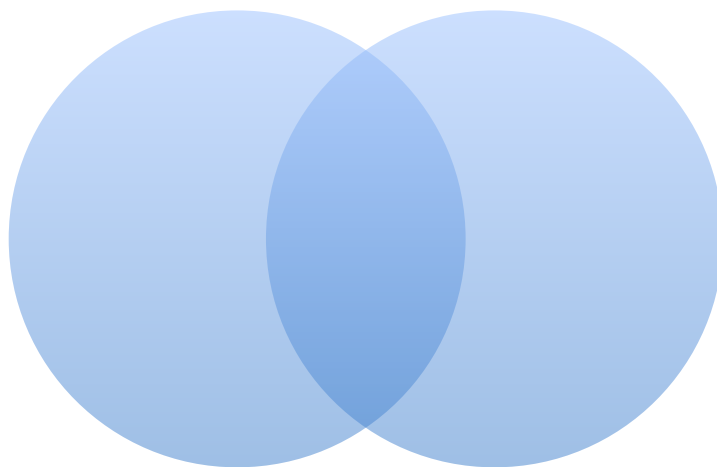


Figure 4. Venn Diagram.

---

<sup>33</sup> Abram, “Transitional Objects,” 233.

<sup>34</sup> Abram, “Transitional Objects,” 317.

In it here, in this third, intermediate space where Winnicott locates cultural experience, and here, where Rogers representationally reinforces this cultural, creative work.

Winnicott's paper that links these two concepts was published in 1967 and is entitled, "The Location of Cultural Experience." Essentially, Winnicott explains the infant's path toward becoming human in the world in a series of critical moves involving mutuality, object relating, object usage, and the development of cultural practices. He begins with the identification of the dyadic self, inscribed in the infant through the first experience of being – through the mother. From here, a transitional phase that helps the child become less dependent on mother ensues with the creation of the transitional object. Transitional phenomena are birthed out of this phenomenon, which, Winnicott posits, becomes the terrain or "location" of cultural experience. Rogers, who read Winnicott during his advanced studies with McFarland, emphasized throughout his life the importance of play and its misapprehension within the conventional wisdom. "Play is often talked about as if it were relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood," he is still quoted as saying.<sup>35</sup>

Johan Huizinga published his groundbreaking theory on and study of play, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, in 1950. In it, he attends to a variety of words in the language of diverse people that relate the Western concept of "play." Citing their further employment in descriptions of rituals and ceremonies which, to a Westerner, might not seem at all related to play, he relates play activities to their civilizing practices, functions, and institutions. Huizinga defines play as "a voluntary activity or occupation

---

<sup>35</sup> As posited by Carolyn Robertson's blog post, "Mister Rogers' Sweet Message to Grownups Is All You Need to Hear," in *Baby Center Blog*, 2 Feb., 2016, [http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom\\_stories/mr-rogers-message-to-02032016grown-up-fans-is-all-you-needs-to-hear/](http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom_stories/mr-rogers-message-to-02032016grown-up-fans-is-all-you-needs-to-hear/).

executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having as its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary life.’”<sup>36</sup> He shows how play activities determine the forms of societal institutions and demonstrates how play activities relate to the practice of law, the art of war, the creation of myth, philosophy, knowledge production and art.<sup>37</sup>

In his 1967 article, “The Location of Cultural Experience,” Winnicott extends the idea of transitional phenomena to cultural experience arguing that cultural experience begins with creative living that first exhibits itself in the act of play.<sup>38</sup> Play occurs in the intermediate space that is created when the child chooses the transitional object – in between Me and Not-me perception. Winnicott creates an arena for this intermediate experience, which he calls potential space, “a wonderfully termed name in its dynamic about-to-be-yet-not-quite-being quality,” writes Tuber.<sup>39</sup> Winnicott connects the creation to this space to the act of playing and makes this act of playing a “precursor to the creative living that is manifested in cultural life.”<sup>40</sup> According to Tuber, this “puts play at its most exalted status in Winnicott’s hierarchy of necessary ingredients for a vital life.”<sup>41</sup> He links transitional phenomena to artistic creativity, religious feeling, dreaming, and also to darker phenomena such as fetishism, drug addiction, and stealing. The key to

---

<sup>36</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1950), 28.

<sup>37</sup> In my subsequent work on Rogers, I plan to incorporate the relevant work of Johan Huizinga, especially his discussion of “the magic circle,” into my current exposition on objects, play, and the ‘NMB.’ See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); also see Lesley Caldwell and Angela Joyce, “Editors’ Introduction,” in their *Reading Winnicott* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 232.

<sup>38</sup> Tuber, *Attachment, Play, and Authenticity*, 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

understanding how the transitional object provides the catalyst for the development of culture and creative living is understanding the infant's action in creating it.

While we as adults see the transitional object as a symbol of the mother, from the baby's perspective, it is the creation of a symbol for the mother that matters. As the baby progresses and can understand or even later put into words the use of a symbol, she has had the transitional object long enough to help tolerate the loss of the mother long enough to take on the world and begin to use it and other symbols to navigate it.<sup>42</sup>

It is here, in this potential space where engagement with the world manifests and the human becomes a manipulator of objects, that the human asserts his creative life force and is able to defend against anxiety in way that are less dependent on his mother.

Rogers Silverstone explores the idea of television as transitional object in *Television and Everyday Life* ("Television, ontology, and the transitional object," in *Television and Everyday Life*, 1-23.) "I want to suggest," he writes, "that our media, television perhaps preeminently, occupy the potential space released by blankets, teddy bears and breasts (Young, 1986), and function cathectically and culturally as transitional objects" (13). Remarkably Rogers, who wrote in the 1960s about the similarities between the breastfeeding child gazing into the mother's eyes and the child sitting in front of the television gazing into the screen, appears to be exploring this same hypothesis. In this regard, he offers a dyadic adventure into this intermediate, potential space where the child can learn and cognitively practice acts of creation, object relations and usage that will foster increasing independence and interactivity with the world and others.

Winnicott theorizes that it is in the potential space, where play, the primary work of the child, ensues. "The playground is a potential space between the mother and the baby or joining mother and baby," he writes. "The thing about playing is always the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 158.

precariousness of the interplay of the personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects.”<sup>43</sup> In the early stages, the mother or mother-figure participates in play with the child, helping the child to go through the process of repudiating, re-accepting, and objectively perceiving the object. This process can only succeed if the mother is prepared to “participate and to give back what is handed out.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, she allows the baby to experience a kind of “magical” control, which provides a sense of omnipotence. “Confidence in the mother makes an intermediate playground here,” writes Winnicott, “where the idea of magic originates.”<sup>45</sup> This sense of magic and the pleasure and excitement it creates in the child, arises in intimacy. Most importantly, in regards to our concerns in understanding *MRN*, it arises “in a relationship that is being found to be reliable.”<sup>46</sup> From here, the child moves towards a play situation where he is alone yet in the presence of someone. In this stage, the child plays on the basis of a key assumption that the person she loves, in large part due to her reliability, continues to be remembered after being forgotten. The child can hold the memory of this person in his mind and maintain a sense of security and confidence. The person is felt by the child “to reflect back what happens in playing.”<sup>47</sup> This is one major aspect of what Rogers tries to do on *MRN*. He offers both mutual play and play in which the child viewer is unaccompanied by him. He constantly offers verbal and material connections between himself, other neighbors, the characters in the neighborhood, and the objects of play in order to create this sense of holding, trust, and an expectation of return. In speech, he offers dialogue

---

<sup>43</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1971), 47.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

about the objects in play, creating a sense of reflectivity that the child will, according to Winnicott, use when Rogers is no longer with him.

As the baby grows and becomes a small child, he searches for reliance on other trust-worthy adults with which to engage and rely upon for security, interactivity, and help. Mister Rogers asserts himself into the child's life here. In his "Philosophy" document, we may recall that he articulated his role in communication with the child as fitting into a network of home and family relationships that constituted the world of the very young child. The first bullet point under the section, "Premises," is titled "Growing Up and the Importance of Family Relationships." It states the following:

Fred Rogers has originated and developed MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD out of his studies and own personal sensitivity to the growing up world of children. He maintains that childhood experiences have potential for being joyful and fearful; the nature of these experiences is greatly determined by the quality of support that the child receives from adults. In the early years, the most dominant influences on a child come from his home or family relationships.<sup>48</sup>

From here, he moves to assert himself, as a television on-air, into this sphere of the home/family. As such, he understands himself on-air as serving in a trusting and influential adult role in relation to the viewing child. In the second premise, "Television and television Artists — participants in family relationships," the author(s) assert that when Rogers looks into the camera and speaks with the child at the dialogical level, "the child's environment has been extended to include a meaningful relationship with another adult."<sup>49</sup> In this way, the author(s) assert, Rogers achieves participant status in family relationships. Thus, by offering his program as a transitional object, indeed one that is

---

<sup>48</sup> Rogers, "Philosophy," Fred Rogers Archives, Folder "Videodiscs," Box EU88.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

itself located within the child's (ostensibly) nurturing home environment, Rogers extends himself into the space of kinship.

As the trusted adult, Rogers meets with the child in the space most familiar to her – the home. Interestingly, there are a couple of layers of home that exist in the process of viewing *MRN*. The child is ostensibly in his own home, where the television is situated. And Mister Rogers too, presents himself to the child in the setting of his “television house,” which is constructed to look like the interior of a modest 1960s home. For the small child, the home is the space where most living takes place. It is where he and his kin eat, engage socially, rest, and sleep. It is also where the young child engages in the work of childhood – play. Also, at least for most of the day, the very young child occupies this space *with* mother.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the space is inscribed by the activities and relationships that ensue and are developed within it. Rogers wishes to present himself in this space of home because it is immediately identified by the child as familiar, safe, and inscribed with the warmth and closeness of family bonds. So while he overtly positions himself as a kind neighbor and is not technically a part of the family bloodline, he functions at the parasocial level and in the larger symbolic cognitive space, perhaps due to his warmth and the home space in which he operates, as a familial figure – substituting as a kind of father surrogate or as the compassionate father-figure children desired but maybe did not have. At the same time he is involved in transitional objectification with the aim of advancing the child's developmental history.

---

<sup>50</sup> Many mothers worked during this period. In 1970, about 1:4/1:5 worked during their childbearing years. By 1976, 40% of women with children aged 3-6 worked and other cared for the child. See “Facts Over Time: Women in the Labor Force,” United States Department of Labor website, [http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/facts\\_over\\_time.htm](http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/facts_over_time.htm).



Let us now return to object relations and object usage and the key role that it plays in the *Neighborhood* in regards to the act of play. Winnicott's summary of play is helpful for understanding the role it plays in a child's life and why Rogers has made it one of the centerpieces of his program. First, Winnicott suggests that it is useful to think about a state of *preoccupation* in regards to grasping the state of play. The content, he posits, does not matter. Play involves a kind of "near-withdrawal" state, which Winnicott compares to *concentration* in older children and adults. The child in play cannot be easily interrupted nor can she admit intrusions.<sup>51</sup> Second, he writes, this area of playing lies outside the individual. That is to say that it is not inner psychic reality. Third, play consists of the child collecting "objects or phenomena from external reality" and using them "in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality."<sup>52</sup> The child thus exudes a bit of "dream potential" and "lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality."<sup>53</sup> While playing, the child manipulates the external phenomena he chooses in the service of the dream. That is to say that he invests the chosen phenomena with dream meaning and feeling.

Let us take a look at how Rogers weaves these cognitive and imaginative processes of play through Episode 0016 of the first season through the introduction and use of an object.<sup>54</sup> As summarized earlier, Rogers enters his home with a mesh bag full of pieces of wood and a larger, thin wooden slab. He proceeds to hammer nails, one by one into the wooden slab, eventually engaging with the objects in imaginative, symbolic play

---

<sup>51</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> This episode aired on 11 Mar., 1968. For a summary of the episode, see "Episode 0016," in *The Neighborhood Archive*, <http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/mrn/episodes/0016/index.html>.

by assigning each nail a role as a family member according to its size. This leads him into a short song about the feeling of wanting to be like one's mother or father. After the song, Rogers engages with the smaller wood pieces by placing them in different positions in relation to each other. In one position, the pieces of wood resemble a plane. In another, he conjoins them to create a boat-like object. Pleased with the boat, he nails the pieces together and travels to the kitchen to fill the sink with water to see whether it will float. It does. The pacing of the play is slow, the camera cuts are few, enabling the viewer to develop a sense of *preoccupation* with the on-screen activities. Interestingly, one tends to become somewhat mesmerized, even as an adult, when watching this segment of the program.

Rogers demonstrates a deep understanding of Winnicott's elements of play – the gathering of objects, the sense of *preoccupation* that develops while engaging in play with the objects, and the use of the object in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. This latter aspect, I posit, is illustrated by Rogers' desire to merge the nail with the wood, his efforts to imagine the nails as family members, and then the development of this fantasy via a song about the love of a parent and the desire to become like him. In light of the foregoing discussion, this appears to be Rogers' attempt to supplant the father through invitational identification with the child, being recruited in oedipal desire. The wooden objects are then further utilized to explore conceptions of advanced transportation technologies, i.e. planes and boats. Rogers places his newly built boat representation in a basin of water in order to model a boat in its natural habitat – floating on water. He spends a moment watching the water run and fill the sink with pleasure and asks the viewer if she enjoys watching water run from the

faucets. Again, Rogers consistently creates ties between the everyday objects he adopts for discussion and use on the program with the life and perceived interests of the child viewer.

Rogers' display of care and mutuality throughout the play sequence illustrate yet another one of Winnicott's primary elements of play – trust. "Playing implies trust," he writes, "and belongs to the potential space between (what was at first) baby and mother-figure, with the baby in a state of near absolute dependence, and the mother-figure's adaptive function taken for granted by the baby."<sup>55</sup> Rogers introduces the hammer and nail and proceeds to use them in a non-threatening manner. He offers assurance throughout the project by engaging in play and communication with the viewer in a relaxed, yet focused way. In playing with the objects and tools successfully, relating to the viewer on an interpersonal level by calling to mind her father, singing about his own inner longings to be like his father, and consistently addressing the viewer with a direct and friendly gaze, he builds and maintains a sense of trust.

In the next sequence of the program, Rogers helps the child viewer prepare for a transition to the 'NMB,' the realm of fantasy on *MRN*, by speaking into his pretend tin can phone to an 'NMB' puppet. Rogers tells the puppet Edgar, over the "phone," that he has been hammering nails into wood and learns from Edgar that a famous sculptor named Virgil Cantini<sup>56</sup> is visiting the 'NMB.' When the "phone call" ends, Rogers announces to the viewer that they will now go and visit the "NMB." Further assisting the child prepare for the environmental transition, he counts to thirteen. As they count, the camera slowly

---

<sup>55</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 51-52.

<sup>56</sup> See "Virgil D. Cantini / Acclaimed Artist, Longtime Pitt Professor," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, 5 May, 2009.

zooms into the yellow bulb of the traffic light next to Rogers, which blinks in concert with Rogers' verbal counting. Layers of message redundancy are intentionally built into *MRN* in order to provide clarity and consistency for the young child, who is at an age where transitions can easily produce anxiety if not prefaced and prepared for. We then cut to a shadow on a wall of a spinning sculpture of what looks like a human figure dancing. The spinning makes the sculpture look as if the figure is actually dancing and Johnny Costa overlays a dreamlike composition on the celeste providing audio background. It is relaxing to look at and also mesmerizing with the overlaying music. As the camera zooms out, we see the actual sculpture beside and below its twirling shadow on the wall.

At the castle, King Friday asks Cantini to tell him what he used to make “that beautiful sculpture that goes round and round?”<sup>57</sup> Looking over at the sculpture, which we gain a visual on as well, Cantini responds. He says that he used “nails and steel and bronze, and a hot, settling torch.” As we get a closer look at the twirling statue, we can see that the human figure is made out of short, thin pieces of steel. Friday asks, “Well how did you make that man?” Cantini explains that he used flat nails, on which he brazed a coat of bronze. “This is man as he is exploring the universe, just like the astronauts who are going off into space,” he says.<sup>58</sup> Friday adds that “they certainly are looking and looking and enjoying what they can find.” He compliments Cantini on the beauty of the sculpture and the celeste continues to play dreamlike music throughout the dialogue as the camera cuts back and forth between Friday, Cantini, and the twirling sculpture.

---

<sup>57</sup> “Episode 0016,” *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, 11 Mar., 1968.

<sup>58</sup> Note that this episode occurred a little over a year before the 21 July, 1969 moon walk. U.S. space exploration was glorified by Kennedy and was an exciting topic of the national public discourse.

The introduction of play with nails and wood (basic forms) in Rogers' home has led thus led us into a deeper dream-like sequence where imaginative characters like puppets engage with real, everyday people in a dialogue about things having to do with the objects in their basic forms. Here, the correlation between the subject matter in the first *MRN* segment is directly linked to the happenings in the 'NMB.' Rogers plays with wood, a hammer, and nails with the child to create new forms out of the originals. His constructive choices involve the making of fairly basic new items. Hammering the nails into the large wood board is primarily an action of practice – a kind of first step in learning to hammer nails into wood. Rogers does, however, imagine a symbolic creation during this process when he ascribes each nail as a family member. Next, he engages in more advanced artisanal work by creating a plane and a boat by manipulating a few pieces of wood. Still, he works at the level of the child during this segment. In the 'NMB,' which aims to simulate the child's experience of fantasizing and playing "make believe," he expands on the creative play that he engaged in in the first, "home" segment. In the 'NMB,' characters often engage with the same object in both similar and different, producing their own creative and social experience with the object(s). In this particular segment, Rogers showcases an adult artist, who works at a very advanced level with nails in order to show the depth of possibilities in working with just a few basic material elements. Look and see what you can do with these objects both as a child, and later in life, as a grownup. You can learn to create and craft interesting and complex things with these everyday items. "There is a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural experiences,"

Winnicott writes.<sup>59</sup> Rogers interweaves these interactions together to produce a dialectical movement of cultural engagement and reality making.

Further connecting the child's play with the work of the artisan, Friday asks Cantini if he always enjoyed playing with nails "and things and such" when he was a young boy. Cantini says that he thinks all boys enjoy playing with nails and hammers and hatchets and notes how easy they are to find around the house.<sup>60</sup> He shows Friday a figurine he crafted of a bull, which he then playfully thrusts at Friday, who hops aside avoiding the bull's charge. The camera zooms in on Friday and the bull figurine, which Cantini suggests he touch, perhaps in order to "tame" it. Gently, Friday places his mitten-like puppet hand on the bullhorns and asks Cantini if they were made out of nails. "The horns are bent nails," Cantini says, "and the other ones I use just straight." Here, Cantini and Friday demonstrate how, through gentle and respectful play, combined with dialogical examination, people can learn and discover new possibilities for the satisfying work of creating/playing by manipulating objects with one's hands.

The sequence continues to open up as Cantini shows Friday the other animal figurines he has crafted. "I have a whole family of deer in here," he says pointing at a table that showcases several of deer-like figurines made out of nails. Friday points to one figurine that he perceives has a mane. Cantini notes that this deer is a "fighting deer" and he places it and another in combat using his hands to buck the deer into each other. This part illustrates another key element of play as articulated by Winnicott – that play

---

<sup>59</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 51.

<sup>60</sup> Note how Cantini, reifying gender norms of the time, assigns his own interests in manipulating everyday objects as characteristically and exclusively male. His statement effectively teaches that only boys are to be interested in this kind of play. It is most unwelcoming to female viewers in general and in particular to those who find his craft of interest.

involves the body “because of the manipulation of objects” and “because certain types of interest are associated with certain aspects of bodily excitement.”<sup>61</sup> “They fight with their horns, don't they?” King Friday asks while the camera remains focused on the manipulation of the two deer figurines. “And all those are nails?” he asks. Cantini responds affirmatively, listing the different kinds of nails he used – “sharp nails, some flat nails, some penny nails, an eight-penny nail.” The camera moves into an even tighter shot of the deer and of Cantini’s large hands as they touch the figurines while speaking about them and the work he did to create them.

My memories of watching *MRN* as a child and my experience of watching the program now, as an adult, are dominated by feelings of pleasure that I think relate to two prominent aspects of the program. First, like many viewers express in their letters to Mister Rogers (see Chapter 4), I feel that he actually knows and cares about me at some interpersonal level. I sense that he recognizes me when he looks into the camera and speaks directly to me. It is as if we are engaged in a kind of affective relationship imbued with trust and mutual respect. I enjoy listening to him speak to me in his patient and settled manner. As the program unfolds and he shares his world of object and neighbors with me, I feel a satisfying sense of connectivity and continuity. I settle into viewing the program as one might do when visiting the home of a friend. There is an overlaying air of reassurance and warmth that translates from the screen. Second, I derive gratification out of the ways he relates, with his body and his speaking voice, to the objects he presents. There is something in the simplicity of the representation – the uncluttered environment, the slow camera movement, the lack of adornment on the items of furniture, persons, and

---

<sup>61</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 52.

objects in his home and in the ‘NMB’ – that evokes a feeling of the “organic” and a sense of “the real.” There is nothing that is distracting in the communication. In fact, the layers of focus – Rogers’ focus on me, his object, his neighbors and the camera’s focus on a limited numbers of angled shots – create a sense of focus for the viewer. The visual display is clear, direct, and simple, as is the embodied nonverbal and verbal communication. There is no excess of noise, nor sense of clutter. There are no quick cuts from shot to shot. I feel a sense of human bonding, creative pleasure, and “primitive knowledge,”<sup>62</sup> similar to the emotions that arise when one feels a part of a dyad or group and engaged in satisfying creative work/play in the warmth of a safe home environment, classroom, or work place.<sup>63</sup>

In Episode 0016, these feelings are stimulated almost immediately and sustained by a variety of actions throughout the program. Rogers’ simple hammering of nails into wood, his verbal evocation of family members as metaphor for the nails (e.g. father, mother, sister, brother), the vocalization of his song about the deep longing to grow and become like one’s parent, the moment he spends watching the sink fill up with running water, the placement of the wooden boat in the water, Mr. Cantini’s big hands holding the nail-deer figurines, his gruff voice. Why does this aesthetic communicate such feelings? Baurillard’s theory of marginal objects/antiques provides a useful reading of the way that these objects function within the postmodern system of meanings and may help us understand better the power of the *MRN* aesthetic.

---

<sup>62</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (New York: Verso, 1996), 76.

<sup>63</sup> For an in-depth, groundbreaking examination and analysis of the sensations I describe here see Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).



## Origins, History, and Pleasure: *MRN*'S System of Objects

In *The System of Objects* (1996), Baudrillard posits that “survivals from the traditional, symbolic order,” which include a range of objects categorized as baroque, folkloric, exotic, and antique play an important part in modernity. The marginal object, he writes, “is not an anomaly relative to the system.”<sup>64</sup> Rather, “the functionality of modern objects becomes historicalness in the case of the antique object without this implying that the object ceases to function as a sign within the system.”<sup>65</sup>

What we have here is the connotation of nature, of ‘naturalness’ – indeed, fundamentally we have the ultimate instantiation of that connotation, which is to be found in signs of previous cultural systems....the way in which antiques refer to the past gives them an *exclusively* mythological character. The antique object no longer has any practical application, its role being merely to *signify*. It is astructural, it refuses structure, it is the extreme case of disavowal of the primary functions. Yet it is not afunctional, nor purely ‘decorative,’ for it has a very specific function within the system, namely the signifying of time.<sup>66</sup>

One primary aesthetic characteristic of *MRN* is the “lived-in” and used quality of the furniture, appliances, and objects that constitute Rogers’ home. As Marilyn Casto notes in her essay on the concept of hand production in Colonial Revival interior design, “Colonial Revival interiors contained numerous references to the concept of hand production, although the objects displayed were not necessarily crafted by hand.”<sup>67</sup> She continues,

Artifacts included both items that might have been manually produced in an earlier age (braided rugs or candles)....These furnishings were deliberately selected and placed to convey concepts, impressions, and values to visitors and as visual reminders of house occupants. The objects’ mnemonic role evoked a romanticized pre-industrial world of diligent, skilled, and contented workers—a world very different from that of the Colonial Revivalists themselves, with its

---

<sup>64</sup> Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 73.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>67</sup> Casto, “The Concept of Hand Production in Colonial Revival Interiors,” 321.

troublesome issues of urban growth and shifting social patterns.<sup>68</sup>

Casto's analysis of the conceptual and connotative meanings imbued in such stylized objects compliments Baudrillard's understanding of the ways that such objects are imbued with symbolic value characterized by a notion of mythic origins. In a slightly different yet similar way, the 'NMB' looks and feels like a set crafted for a theater production. It lacks glamour and any sense that an industrial machine had anything to do with its creation. Rather, due to its seemingly handmade nature, its aura communicates the sense that the set was constructed locally, by a team of people directly involved with the production of *MRN*.

When viewing the 'NMB' segment, one does not necessarily imagine people working to create the set, its castle, tree, museum-go-round, etc. with their own hands and shop-like tools. This sense that the object is the work of human hands, a pre-industrial object, I would argue exists at the visceral level of meaning in the mind of the modern viewer. It is the lack of perfection in the building assembly, along with the similarly imperfect quality of the paint job that communicate this homemade, anthropocentric aesthetic feeling. The furniture and the objects in Rogers' "television house" imbue a similar sensory field. Although none of the objects are necessarily antiques, their "lived-in" aesthetic evokes a status similar to that of antiques from the perspective of Baudrillard's system of objects.

To the extent that it [the antique] is there to conjure up time as part of the atmosphere, and to the extent that it is experienced as a sign, it is simply one element among others, and relative to all others. On the other hand, to the extent that it is not on a par with other objects and manifests itself as total, as an authentic presence, it enjoys a special psychological standing.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 74-75.

What is this special psychological standing? Baudrillard wonders. “What lies behind the persistent search for old things – for antique furniture, authenticity, period style, rusticity, craftsmanship, hand-made products, native pottery, folklore, and so on?” What is the motivation behind moderns’ persistent search for old things, he asks. Baudrillard suggests that the demand to which these items respond is a desire for “definitive or fully realized being.”<sup>70</sup> That is to say that the “antique” object is viewed as perfect because it is constituted by that which exists in the present as having occurred in a former time. The object has human lineage. “It is always,” writes Baudrillard, “‘the family portrait’: the immemorialization, in the concrete form of an object, of a former being – a procedure equivalent, in the highest register of the imaginary, to a suppression of time.”<sup>71</sup> In this way, it feels “authentic.” It was created in the past, used, transformed over time, and remains resilient as displayed by its existence in the current tense. This characteristic of the antique, Baudrillard continues, is precisely what is missing from what he calls modern objects of the “new technical order.”

[These objects] exist only in the present, in the indicative or in the practical imperative, which exhaust their possibilities in use, never having occurred in a former time, and which, though they can in varying degrees support the spatial environment, cannot support the temporal one. The functional object is efficient; the mythological object is fully realized.”<sup>72</sup>

He posits that the fully realized event signified by the mythological object is birth. Unlike the functional object in the “new technological order,” the mythological object creates the feeling of others, of a present world connected to an ancestral world in which “I am the

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 75

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

one who *has been*.”<sup>73</sup> Baudrillard contrasts this sense that arises from mythological object with that of the functional object, which lends a feeling of “I am not the one who *is*, in the present, full of *angst*.”<sup>74</sup> The antique object, therefore, presents as a myth of origins.<sup>75</sup> This “nostalgia for origins” and “obsession with authenticity” are the two most distinctive features of the mythology of the antique object, according to Baudrillard.

In the United States, however, style choices like those made by Rogers on *MRN* (e.g., Colonial Revival), carry wider cultural consequences as they tend to highlight New England<sup>76</sup> as the American “hearth zone” and center of the nation’s colonial beginnings from which the rest of the country derived historical and cultural lineage. Of course, this means obscuring the south and slavery, the history of African Americans, the development and conquest of the West, the history of American Indians, the relationship between whites and Mexicans in the Southwest, and large cities like New York and Chicago with their many working-class immigrants. In this regard, it is not surprising that Rogers, whose cultural affinity for the traditions of mainline Protestantism was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, replicates a Colonial Revival aesthetic on his program. Indeed, *MRN*’s visual artefactual field in its set signifies mainline Protestant cultural dominance and thus includes several layers of cultural exclusion. Notably, *MRN* is not peculiarly in doing this but it does reflect a fairly longstanding cultural trend within the dominant hegemony.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>76</sup> Rogers summered with his family on Martha’s Vineyard in a small house on the ocean. The named the house, “The Crooked House.”

<sup>77</sup> For further discussion on the cultural relationship to the antique in the U.S., see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

Rogers clearly values the feeling of authenticity produced by handmade, lived-in objects, as they nurture this perceived human craving for origins and history. Each of the sweaters Rogers wears on the program that reside in his “television house” closet was made by his mother, Joanne Rogers. The puppets in the ‘NMB’ are simple, almost ragged in their appearance. They were handcrafted by people he knew. *MRN* features the transformation of objects, as they pass through the hands of people, who either transform them physically or who alter their symbolic meaning through human contact and social mobility.

In many episodes, Rogers ventures out into the community in order to visit the places where objects are made. In one popular segment, he visits a crayon factory and we see all the levels of industrial processing that turn colorized clay into crayons. This episode is interesting in light of Baudrillard’s thesis but also in light of commodity fetishism. I read it as an effort to humanize the faceless industrial factory and dehumanizing processes of industrial production. Michael Billig asserts that Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism provides insight into the psychology of consumer capitalism. He argues that implicit in Marx’s analysis of commodities is a “psychology of collective amnesia” in regards to the forgotten status of the origins of commodities.<sup>78</sup>

Marx (1915) specifically used the image of a hidden truth. He wrote that ‘the determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time becomes ‘a secret,’ and, thus, money ‘actually conceals, instead of disclosing, the social character of private labour’ (pp. 86-87). This concealment operates through a process of social forgetting.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Michael Billig, “Commodity Fetishism and Repression: Reflections on Marx, Freud and the Psychology of Consumer Capitalism,” *Theory Psychology* 9.3 (1999): 313-29.

<sup>79</sup> Billig, 315.

We can Rogers trying to bring visibility to human production in the ways that the crayon factory segment illustrates the intricate mechanization steps in creating boxed crayon products. Here, he attempts to reduce the alienation between the producers of the products and its consumers. Viewers of the program watch the inner workings machines and are shown the ways that people are involved in the process of ensuring the machine's proper functioning and the creative process of making and packaging the crayons.

Whereas Billig holds that the pleasures of consumerism would be diminished if consumers were exposed to the productive origins of such goods, Rogers sees the restoration of transparency in the social production and exchange of products as rewarding, and indeed pleasurable, in the ways that such knowledge reestablishes the visibility of social connection in the product creation and exchange process.

A railroad tank car carries the hot wax to the factory. From the tank, the wax is poured into a "kind of big kettle," Rogers narrates as we view these actions taking place on the screen. A type of powder is poured on the wax to make it hard. After this, the pigment is applied to the mixture in the form of colored flour. The particular pigment displayed on the film is yellow. Next, the mixture is drained into a pouring bucket. We watch as a man lifts the pouring bucket full of the yellow mixture and pours it over a metal sheet with hundreds of holes the circumference of a crayon. The visceral nature of the material actions, e.g the mixing of the liquid, the dying of the mixture, the pouring of the mixture onto the metal sheets, is remarkably mesmerizing and pleasurable to view. "The people wait five minutes for the yellow wax to get hard and then they scrape off the top, which they will melt and use again," Rogers describes as we watch someone's arms and hands scrape off the top of the metal sheets. Then, we watch the cleared away metal

plates sprout up yellow crayons in magical unison out of the hundreds of holes. A man then grabs the metal sheet and takes it to another area where he dumps the crayons out onto a shelf and pushes them into an orderly line with his palms and fingers. Grabbing a portion of at least a hundred yellow crayons, he delivers them to another area, placing them on yet another pile of yellow crayons. From there, we watch a woman use a small shovel to gather another large group of crayons together, place them onto another machine that orders the crayons into a single-file line and produces a mechanized punching sound. “Can you imagine what this machine is for?” Rogers asks. The camera pans over the crayons making their way through sprockets and pockets and knobs to reveal the crayon labels being wrapped around each crayon. “It’s like ferris wheel, isn’t it?” Rogers says. We then cut to a larger room where many people are seen working at various stations. This, Rogers tells us, is the collating room where sixteen different colors of crayons are put together. A wonderfully colorful shot in which rows of various crayons are side by side one another in a machine that assembles them into the proper order to be placed in their cardboard boxes. Finally, we see multiple hands working with the boxes on a table, placing them into larger shipping boxes. “And then people take those boxes to the stores,” Rogers says, “where other people come to buy them.

In this visit and many others, Rogers offers a lens into the hidden spaces created by the capitalist system. As Grant Noble observes in *Children In Front of the Small Screen*, the industrial city can be fragmentary and discontinuous. In contrast, village life – the social structure that peoples lived in and evolved within up into the dawn of modernity – is a cohesive, integrated whole. “In the ‘single’ stage village community,” Noble writes, “the total social organization is visible, and it is easy to see how social roles

are interrelated.”<sup>80</sup> Noble posits that “by exposing disparate individuals to the same familiar content, which is remarkably repetitive, does in part restore a village type of community.”<sup>81</sup> Such observation is remarkably interesting in regards to the *MRN* project. Noble posits, following Marx, that the consequences of industrial, modern life are such that he is likely to become alienated, “that is, made to feel an alien or outsider, when he can no longer see himself as part of an organic whole.”<sup>82</sup> Rogers, it would seem, seeks to flatten the barriers for seeing all aspects of the society’s makeup. Indeed, at nearly every level of *MRN*, we see him engaged in a concentrated effort to present a level of processual continuity of form and content. The factory visits are a way of expanding his interest in helping the viewer see the various processes at work in human life, at the level of the individual, the dialogical, the community, and the wider society.

In the case of Episode 0016, Mister Rogers verbally notes the origins of the wooden slabs he brings into the house, stating that he has just come from the lumberyard. Using the hammer and nails in his toolbox, he transforms the slabs into a wooden airplane and a wooden boat. Prior to that, he practices hammering nails into the large board and gives the nails family member titles, adding to their symbolic meaning relating to clan and kinship through the imagination and speech verbalization. The theme of creating and transforming objects continues in the “NMB,” where we meet Mr. Cantini, an artist who makes figurines out of nails. Such examination and object usage on *MRN* demonstrates Rogers’ “obsession,” to use Baudrillard’s verbiage, with understanding the social and material origins of everyday, non-commodified objects. After learning the

---

<sup>80</sup> Grant Noble, *Children in Front of the Small Screen* (London: Constable, 1975), 17.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*



object's origins, Rogers works his own hands on the object, inscribing his own mark on the item as if attempting to become a part of the object's lineage. "The fascination of handicraft derives from an object's having passed through the hands of someone the marks of whose labour are still inscribed thereupon: we are fascinated by what has been *created*, and is therefore unique, because the *moment* of creation cannot be reproduced," posits Baudrillard.<sup>83</sup>

Similar ideas regarding objects, perception, and pleasure have been more recently discussed by Paul Bloom, a Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science at Yale. Bloom has investigated how pleasure works in the human mind from a social-scientific perspective. His research has yielded a compelling theory that posits that humans assign value to objects based on an object's origins, history, and essence. Bloom has noted that one of the most exciting developments in cognitive science is the idea that humans "have a default assumption that things, people, and events have invisible essences that make them what they are."<sup>84</sup> Essentialism, Bloom notes, has been identified by these cognitive scientists to constitute a significant influence in how we understand and process the material and social world. Developmental and cross-cultural psychologists have posited that this essentialism is in fact instinctual and universal. "We are," he writes, "natural-born essentialists."<sup>85</sup> Bloom suggests in his research that this human characteristic not only influences how we perceive and understand the world but also shapes our experience. In regards to this shaping of experience, Bloom pays special attention to

---

<sup>83</sup> Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 76.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Bloom, "Why We Like What We Like," *Observer* 23.8 (2010), <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2010/october-10/why-we-like-what-we-like.html>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

pleasure. “What matters most is not the world as it appears to our senses. Rather, the enjoyment we get from something derives from what we think that thing really is,” he argues. In a TED Radio hour, Bloom tells host Guy Roz that while we can get pleasure from appreciating an object’s utility, yes, but that knowing where an object came from is also a powerful determinant in our appreciation of an object. Knowing from where the object came, Bloom theorizes, transforms our experience of the object. “For any sort of pleasure,” Bloom says, “we are obsessed with origin and history.”<sup>86</sup> His theories, arrived at from social-scientific inquiry, appear to correlate quite strikingly with those of Baudrillard, who posited that “the mere fact that a particular object has belonged to a famous or powerful individual may confer value on it.”<sup>87</sup>

Bloom’s discussion of essence, origins, and history speaks to Rogers’ beloved quote from *The Little Prince* – “One only sees clearly with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.” Although Bloom does not approach the matter from the perspective of the heart, he does suggest that “essence” is something that operates underneath and thus somewhat hidden. The scene in *The Little Prince* that ends with the “invisible to the eye” quotation suggests that a thing’s essence is perceived as having value as a result of a process in which ties are established.

The scene begins when the prince comes across a fox in a field. The prince asks the fox to come and play with him. “I cannot play with you,” says the fox. “I am not tamed.” The prince does not understand and asks the meaning of the word ‘tame.’ “It is an act too often neglected,” the fox responds, “It means to establish ties.”

---

<sup>86</sup> Bloom, “Why Do We Like What We Like?,” TED Talks, <http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/308752278/brand-over-brain?showDate=2015-01-16>.

<sup>87</sup> Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 76.

To me you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other boys and I have no need for you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox, like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world.<sup>88</sup>

The prince tells him that he does not have time to tame him because he has friends to make and “a great many things to understand.” To this remark, the fox replies, “one only understands the things that one tames.” Men have no time to understand things anymore, the fox continues, “They buy all the things ready made at the shop. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship. So men have no friends anymore.” He tells the prince that if he wants a friend, he should tame him. When asked by the prince exactly how he should go about taming him, the fox tells the prince that he must be very patient.

First, you will sit down at a distance from me—like that—in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstanding. But you will sit a little bit closer to me, every day...<sup>89</sup>

The prince agrees to tame him and comes back to visit the fox every day. He makes a point of coming at the same hour after the fox explains to him the importance of rites.<sup>90</sup>

After an unknown period of time, the prince is finished taming the fox. “Ah,” says the fox. “I shall cry.”<sup>91</sup> The fox’s sadness over their goodbye makes the prince upset. In an angry tone, he submits that he should never have agreed to tame the fox at all if this

---

<sup>88</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971) 66.

<sup>89</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, 67.

<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, the fox discusses the importance of rites with the prince. Just as he decried the consumer culture of buying premade products, he mourns the loss of rites and rituals in modern society stating that “[Rites] are actions that are often neglected. They are what make one day different from the other, one hour from the other hours....If the hunters danced at just anytime, every day would be like every other day, and I should never have any vacation at all.” Notably, Rogers sticks to a very clear order of rites and rituals on his television program. Indeed, rites are arguably one of those other invisible essentials – hidden phenomena that bring pleasure.

<sup>91</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, 68.

was to be the result. “I never wished you any harm; but you wanted me to tame you,” he tells the fox. “Now you are going to cry...Then it has done you no good at all,” says the prince.<sup>92</sup> The fox disagrees and tells the prince to go and look at the many roses. Prior to their agreement, the prince had told the fox that back at his home planet, he had a beloved rose who awaited his return. “Go and look again at the roses,” he tells the prince. “You will understand now that yours is unique in all the world.” The prince goes away to look at the roses.

You are not at all like my rose. As yet you are nothing. No one has tamed you, and you have tamed no one. You are like my fox when I first knew him. He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I have made him my friend, and now he is unique in all the world.<sup>93</sup>

He continues,

You are beautiful, but you are empty. One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you—the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of your other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars....; because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even something when she said nothing. Because she is *my* rose.<sup>94</sup>

Having realized and verbalized the importance of “establishing ties,” the phrase the fox used when trying to define the term ‘tame’ at the beginning of the scene, the Little Prince returns to meet the fox and offers him a goodbye. The fox reciprocates and offers him the following pieces of wisdom. “And now here is my very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. It is the time you

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.”<sup>95</sup> According to the fox, this is a truth that men have forgotten. He urges the prince not to forget, telling him that he is responsible for his rose. “I am responsible for my rose,” repeats the little prince so as to remember.

In this critical pedagogical scene from *The Little Prince*, the fox, who models the traditional European trope of the wise animal, teaches the young boy about the importance of establishing ties with an other. This process of ‘taming,’ as the fox terms it, requires behaviors, orientations, approaches, and uses of time (wasted time) that the fox says have been lost among contemporary peoples. One is invited to conclude that this critique is Saint-Exupéry’s message to moderns, who have, in their adoption of practices of industry, Taylorism, commodity consumption, etc., abandoned the acts of “establishing ties” that he argues, via the character of the fox, make living meaningful and rewarding. It is in these seemingly invisible acts and gestures in which relations are established that a deep sense of value, appreciation, and worth is created. The fox notes the disposition/practice of patience is critical in the taming process. He describes the gradual process of taming as one characterized by incremental steps toward closeness. First, he says, the prince should sit down at a distance from him and the fox will then look at him out of the corner of his eye and the prince will not speak a word. “Words are the source of misunderstanding,” he says, emphasizing the importance of embodied gesturing, proxemics, and general nonverbal communication. Then, as the days go on, the prince will sit closer and closer to him. When the prince speaks of the ways he established ties with the rose, he details the concrete acts that constituted this process. He

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 71.

watered the rose; he placed a glass globe around her to protect her from the elements; he sheltered her behind a screen; he killed caterpillars who threatened her; he listened to her. These actions, all involve material engagement with an other through bodily and sensory action. They involve speech, sharing space, hearing, giving, receiving, and exercising disciplinary efforts to engage. In short, they involve some semblance of personal, interactional care. The fox contrasts the actions involved in this process of “establishing ties” with the act of buying “things all ready made at the shops.” In this sweeping action of buying, no significant act is made that establishes ties between the consumer and seller or the consumer and object. The transaction is empty.<sup>96</sup>

*MRN* is greatly concerned in this process of “establishing ties” and employs simple, embodied acts of care throughout the program. Each episode involves continuous acts of engagement between people and their peers and people and objects that have come out of the hands of *homo faber* – they are manmade objects, not machine-made objects. Rogers shares space with his “television friend” and with the neighbors who visit him. He interacts with them through speech – a speech that is careful to express care for the other on a consistent basis. Then, he engages with his “television friend” through acts of play that involve demonstrations of and interactions with manmade objects and their creative power. Together, he and viewer assess, assemble, and disassemble the object(s) during the program. He questions the origins of the objects and attempts to trace them if possible. It is through these acts of embodied engagement that value is created and maintained in Rogers’ interconnected socio-cultural world of the “Neighborhood.” It is

---

<sup>96</sup> This relates to the term, “cash nexus,” in Marxist thought and refers to how all human relationships are reduced under capitalism to monetary exchange – especially the relations of production. The concept was famously coined and criticized by nineteenth century Scottish social critic and philosopher Thomas Carlyle in *Chartism* (1839).

the value of usage in friendship, rather than purchase and surplus value that establish meaningful ties and constitute a sense of community.

Let us now engage in an in-depth examination of an *MRN* episode that illustrates well the ways in which Rogers weaves the social and material together on the program. In episode 0111, Rogers arrives with a flashlight. After singing his greeting song, he shows the flashlight to his viewer and demonstrates its functions by flicking the switch on and off. He tells the viewer that he has been thinking about pianos and with the flashlight, moves to look inside his piano and identify its various parts. He opens the top of his upright and shines the light into the interior space. “These are called hammers,” he says touching one hammer and pushing it up to touch the string behind it. “And the little hammers hit the strings.” He then plays the key of the piano to which the hammer is connected and we watch as the hammer responds to the touch by striking the string. Sitting down at the bench and looking into the camera, he says, “each key has a different hammer,” and plays a few notes. He then reaches under the piano and pulls out a long, intricate wooden device that apparently is a model of a piano key.

It’s one key and it follows back here, all the different things that happen  
when you press down this key on the piano. All this moving right in here.  
And then finally the hammer hits the string.

We follow the camera move along with Rogers’ finger as it touches the object and points out its various intricacies. “Look at all these little moving parts,” he notes with an air of calm wonderment. The camera stays focused on the mechanical detail around the hammer and we are given time to gaze and examine the object as we wish. Rogers then places his face behind this area, hits the keys a couple times, and then makes a sound of the key hitting the string vocally. “Boop, boop, boop,” he sings. “Have you ever

wondered how people make real pianos?” he asks the viewer. “I’ve often wondered that. Why don’t we ask Picture-Picture to show us?” We then follow Rogers as he walks across the small living room interior to a picture frame that sits on his wall. This frame is used to play movies that transport us to a place that relates to the object or idea at the center of Rogers’ discussion. Usually the films provide us with a visual representation, commonly edited together B-roll, of how and where the object is made. Rogers will typically provide a voice narration of the steps involved in the process.

In the film on how pianos are made, we are first provided with a bird’s eye view of the basic framework of the inside of a grand piano. A workman is in the process of building it but the film is silent. All we hear is the overlaying piano-playing of Johnny Costa and Rogers’ extemporaneous narration. Note that Rogers leaves plenty of spaces free of his narration, allowing for the visual images and Costa’s background improvisation to unfold.

First goes in the sounding board and then the iron frame that’s the support for the piano goes in....That metal pattern marks where the pegs are for the strings to be put....And out comes the frame again. Do you see it going up with the pulley? The insides of the piano are called the belly of the piano.

Rogers describes the actions as they occur in the various edited shots. Close-ups of object and hand interaction are interwoven with shots of the various parts of the object, along with close-ups of the workman’s face and body. Soon a new workman enters and begins to work with the piano’s strings.

Now this man is stringing the piano. There are different sizes of wire. Do you notice the tape on his fingers? Those aren’t bandages. Those are just to protect his fingers. That man is the best stringer that the factory has....And he winds the strings around the tuning pegs. And each one of those strings goes in separately. And when the piano parts are all together, they put in that part of it with all the keys.



We see the first workman sit down at the piano and test out a few keys with the strings exposed. The film is silent so Costa plays notes mimicking the sounds that might be coming out of the piano as the workman hits the keys. “Each one of ‘em is tested so carefully,” Rogers says.

We watch as the workman removes the wood between the keys and the hammers and uses a wooden bar to lift a set of around a dozen up in the air, in unison, and then push them down. “See all those hammers?” Rogers asks. The workman then takes a metal tool and digs into one of the hammers with it. We cut to a close-up of this action while Costa plays one note in rapidly and rigorously to imitate the action with sound. “Those are little needles that he is using on the hammers. And that softens the hammers to give them a little softer tone,” Rogers says. The workman, then pushes the keyboard back in again, stands up, grabs his tools, and begins to test each note again. The camera cuts to a close-up of his face as he faces down looking at what he is doing with an expression of deep concentration. We then slowly zoom out to view the film in the frame of Picture Picture, indicating the ending of the viewing process. The film soon cuts to an image of a piece of paper with printed and signed names. “And he stamps his name on it, on that slip of paper,” Rogers tells us. “And everyone who has worked on that piano has his name stamped on it.” Another workman appears and polishes the piano with a rag, an action which Rogers, too, observes verbally. Costa’s piano-playing, soft, graceful, and soothing in its finality signals the film’s close. The shot widens out to reveal Rogers standing next to Picture Picture. “Thank you, Picture Picture,” he says. In response, the printed words, “You’re welcome Mister Rogers” appear on the inside of the frame. “Was that interesting?” Rogers asks as he goes and sits down on his couch. “So many things that

people do to make things for us that we don't really realize," he says into the camera. "Pianos are very fancy," he says matter-of-factly. "All of them are fancy on the inside. Many are fancy on the outside. Just like all of us, we're fancy." This prompt leads into a song sung frequently by Rogers on the *Neighborhood* entitled "Everybody's Fancy."

It is interesting that Rogers extends his appreciation of the intricateness of the piano instrument to the human person with the "fancy" adjective and "Everybody's Fancy" song. The piano thus offers another visual metaphor for the word, "fancy," a term Rogers attributes to human qualities in his song. More importantly, Rogers' use of the word "fancy" to describe the piano, followed by his subsequent singing of "Everybody's Fancy," further connects people to the creation of the beautiful and complex instrument. The film, with its emphasis on the creative work of the piano craftsmen in putting together the instrument, extends Rogers' initial human-object relationship that he established in the living room scene featuring only him and the upright piano. In this scene, we view Rogers' *dissect* the instrument in order to understand how the hammer works to produce sound by striking a string. After getting a brief taste of discovery with this cursory examination that takes place in the familiar space of the domestic, we are invited to "travel" to a piano factory where our gaze is expanded and extended to a more intricate and sophisticated viewing of grand piano assembly and workmanship. Here, placement on the object and its various parts serve to transform the objects into an operative whole. We see, and Rogers' points out verbally, the bandages on the second workman's fingers as they handle and manipulate the strings. In a sense, the workman's interaction with the objects in creating the piano speak to Saint-Exupéry's notion of

“taming.” Time is spent understanding and interacting with, in this case, the objects that are used to build a piano.

The workers take great care with the object, executing their tasks with precision and concentration. At the end of the process, Rogers makes a point of noting, each person who worked on the creation of the piano signs his name on a piece of paper to indicate his contribution to the product. In a sense, they make the object *theirs* with this final *rite*. At the close of the film, Rogers notes that often we do not realize how much human effort goes into the making of objects and that we take this for granted. This observation further speaks to Rogers’ concerns about alienation. In this way, he is constantly working on his program to connect products with their human creators and with members of the larger community. His emphasis on craftsmanship and the creative arts has at its core a deep appreciation for the creative drive, the joy that it brings, and the social rewards of sharing one’s work with others. Concomitant with the emphasis on the creative runs an emphasis on the production of an object that is just so over and over again. Like a singer, who wishes to sing a song over and over again *just right*, the artisan derives joy and pride in making the same “perfect” object again and again.

Let us now continue further into Episode 0111’s ‘NMB’ segment, where further and more advanced social engagement with the piano object occurs via the visiting artist Van Cliburn, who performs sophisticated, classical piano pieces for King Friday and Sara Saturday.<sup>97</sup> Just as Mr. Cantini, the sculpture artist who works with nails speaks about how he liked making things with household objects when he was a boy, Van Cliburn, a young man, describes how he learned to play the piano when he was a young boy. In fact,

---

<sup>97</sup> Sara Saturday is Friday’s female friend who in later seasons becomes his wife.

he and Friday have a rather long conversation recalling Van Cliburn's pianist development in which the artists frequently returns to the piano to play samples of the pieces that he discusses. "I began to study and to practice," he tells Friday. "And I know I was playing...the first Prelude and Fugue of Johann Sebastian Bach and also some of the two and three part inventions of Bach." Friday confesses to Van Cliburn that he never got that far in his practice because he regretfully "did not work very hard" at the piano. Soon, Sara Saturday arrives holding up a record album of Van Cliburn's concert performance of *Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1, Van Cliburn*. She offers it to him and Van Cliburn tells her that he feels honored that she has a copy of it. Saturday expresses interest in listening to the record in the "receiving room" later and makes a point of verbalizing the title of the record – "Tchaikovsky Concerto Number 1" – for the viewer. Van Cliburn tells him, proudly but not pompously, that Queen Elizabeth of Belgium was at his concert and how thrilling that was for him. Asked to play another piece for the two, Van Cliburn prefaces his next performance with a background story.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a particularly wonderful, wonderful song – in Germany they call it *Lieder* – that Robert Schumann wrote to his new bride, Clara Rief....And this song is called "Widmung," rather in English "Dedication." And I will play a transcription by Franz Liszt, the famous Hungarian composer. So with your permission and your wish, I would be very happy to play the Liszt transcription of "Widmung by Robert Schumann.

He continues with an anecdote about Rief's father, who was a Professor of Music. Rief's father, Van Cliburn notes, was fairly adamant that his daughter not involved in music – especially not in composition because at the time composers were very poor. Indeed, Schumann was quite poor and as such all that he had to give his bride for a wedding present was this song, "Widmung." The three chuckle and Van Cliburn sits back down at

the piano and performs, with his notably large hands and long fingers, a minute or so of the charming, romantic, and at times playful piece.

The presentation of Van Cliburn further extends the human connection to the piano instrument. While the workers in the factory construct the piano, Van Cliburn plays music on it. In listening to the concert pianist speak about his interest in the piano as a young boy and watching him play advanced pieces on the instrument, the human relationship to the object becomes deeper and more dynamic from the perspective of the viewer. In the beginning segments we enter into a discussion and examination of how people physically construct a piano. This discussion is limited to Rogers looking into the piano and identifying what select pieces of it are doing to help create the instrument's sound. He then shows us a more acute perspective of the hammer-string action by pulling this extracted part out for us to view closer. Next, in the film, we see how those parts are assembled by workmen in the space where such tasks occur – a piano factory. Finally, in the 'NMB,' we see a man using the piano for its intended function – to create music.

The 'NMB' segment begins with Van Cliburn sitting at the instrument and playing a piece. Just as in the beginning of the living room segment, we see the piano in its whole form. From there, in both segments, attention is turned toward a discussion of how these respective wholes were created. In the case of the living room segment, Rogers examines the inside of the piano (whole) where the hammer strikes the string. In the 'NMB' segment, Friday probes Van Cliburn (whole) about where and when he started the process of becoming a professional concert pianist. He then, through dialogue, uncovers the story of a young boy who takes an interest in the instrument at the age of four as a result of watching his mother give piano lessons in his house. Van Cliburn describes

hearing a particular song played by one of his mother's students and then trying to replicate the melody on the piano himself after the student's lesson. "You had listened to it," Friday summarizes after hearing Van Cliburn tell the anecdote, "and then tried to pick it out with your fingers."

Here again, we have an example of parts coming together to create a whole. After he tells the anecdote about his first experience trying to play the piano, Van Cliburn then goes to the piano to play a part of the piece. He has now mastered the piece – the piece is now whole. He was once an apprentice pianist and he is now a master pianist. When he began to learn the piece, it existed only in parts – a melody played with the right hand and supporting notes played with the left hand. As Van Cliburn plays, he notes that the first time he attempted to play the melody of the piece, his feet could not yet reach the piano pedals. He had to wait until he could grow to apply this part to the piece.

Here, and throughout the episode, we witness a critical staple of *MRN* – an emphasis on process and practice. As is often the case on the program, established visiting artists are prompted to note how becoming masters of their craft took a good amount of *practice*. Rogers, too, emphasizes the discipline required to become skilled at a craft or art, almost always using the term, "*practice*," to describe such dedication. As we fade back into the living room via a close-up of the flashing traffic light, we are greeted by Mister Rogers, sitting on his couch where we left him before entering the "NMB." "Oh, what a treat," he says. "And after a lot and lot of practice, Mr. Cliburn got to be one of the world's famous pianists."

In the interest of maintaining his anthropocentric values throughout his programming, Rogers often employs inquiries into everyday objects in which he shows

how such objects can be used in a variety of practical, functional, creative, and imaginative ways. In Episode 0112, Mister Rogers brings in a homemade drum and uses lollipops as sticks to demonstrate the act of drumming. Here, instead of bringing in a shiny, new drum he bought at a store, he uses a homemade one – one that has been created by someone he knows. Further, the drums sticks are created from lollipops. The sticks have already been used, touched, by another giving them an air of human connection. This gives them value in the order of Baudrillard's mythological origins and in Bloom's theory of pleasure and its relationship to a sense of history. In Episode 0055, Mister Rogers arrives with a bag of vegetables, which are later transformed from raw to cooked by neighbor, Chef Brockett. Rogers' valuing of tracing, examining, using, and transforming objects sends an anti-consumerist message to viewers. It is also a message that, while delivered via the television screen, does not inspire television viewing. Rather, Rogers uses the virtual medium to inspire viewers to craft and create things with one's body by using objects and items at hand for most (i.e. everyday and somewhat affordable) in the material world. For Rogers, arts and crafts, the act of creating, manipulating, and transforming objects using one's body, is what makes for healthy living (Bloom might say "pleasure").<sup>98</sup>

In a classic first season episode, 0011, Mister Rogers enters with an oatmeal container. He has stripped any commercial images off the container and glued on a stripe of paper on it that has the word, "Oatmeal," written on it. Instead of putting on his cardigan he dons a lab coat and tells the viewer that he has brought with him, "Not a

---

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion on the phenomenon of hobbies in American life and its relationship to work, see Stephen M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

drum,” he says tapping on the top, “but an Oatmeal box with some oatmeal in it” He shakes the box for audio effect, so as to communicate that oatmeal grains are indeed inside the container. “Do you ever eat oatmeal?” he asks the viewer. “For breakfast, lunch, or dinner? Oats are very good for you, you know.” He further notes that there are lots of things one can make out of oatmeal boxes as well. Then he tells us that he once knew a boy who said “open meal” instead of “oatmeal,” with amusement. “Do you every wonder how oatmeal was made?” he asks. “You know, first it has to grow. Because it’s really oats that grow in the fields.” Then he turns to Picture Picture and asks it to show him and the viewer how oatmeal is made. “Picture Picture on the wall,” he says imitating the Queen’s “Mirror Mirror on the wall” phrase,<sup>99</sup> “Would you kindly show us all how those oats get into boxes like this?” His phrasing is interesting here for two notable reasons. First, his manipulation of Snow White’s classic “Mirror Mirror on the wall” playfully integrates a part of his program with the well-known Western children’s story of Snow White. And second, the way he asks Picture Picture to illustrate how oatmeal is made is phrased in the sentence construction of a child – “how those oats get into boxes like this.” Notably, it does not contain the wording, “how *people* assemble oatmeal boxes,” a phrasing that producer Hedda Sharapan says he introduced later on in programming. Here, the phrase is passive and the human element of creation is not included in the utterance, a fact Rogers noticed at one point and decidedly changed.

Once again, starting with an everyday household item of an oatmeal box, Rogers has made an immediate human connection with the item by handling it himself and then noting how a boy he knows calls oatmeal, “open meal.” He then moves on to trace both

---

<sup>99</sup> *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, directed by Ben Sharpsteen, David Hand, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, and Wilfred Jackson, (1937; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Video, 2001).



the food and the objects origins via a film. First, we view the plowing and raking of a farm field where seeds are planted by a farmer maneuvering a tractor. As usual, Rogers narrates the process as the film unfolds. He notes the dust that the plowing creates. We watch up-close, the seed shoot up from the dirt in oat leaf form. "Of course that takes a long time for it to grow," Rogers notes. "But that's the way it grows. Up, into the sunlight." The film then cuts to a number of leaves growing into full maturity together. "There are all the oats together," Rogers continues. The film then cuts to a moving image of oats falling out of a metal object and onto what looks like a sifter of some sort. "And after they are brought onto the train and brought to the factory, they're put onto a conveyor belt," he says. "Look what a long ride they have," he says as we watch the oats travel along swiftly on the belt. "Boy, that's a fast ride for those oats!" We then see the oats sifted down into a sliding board and listen to Rogers as he narrates each step. The next image is of the cardboard boxes, which mirror the container that Rogers' introduced at the beginning of the program. This shot brings great pleasure as it connects the object made personal by Rogers to its origins in the factory. "[The boxes] are getting filled with the oatmeal," Rogers narrates over the focused, steady shot of one part of the highly mechanized process. We then watch as each box gets a lid. 'Many, many, many, many boxes,' Rogers says playfully. "And there are their lids." The film is brought to conclusion by the camera zooming out and revealing its broadcast inside the Picture Picture frame in Rogers' living room. Standing beside it, Rogers holds the oatmeal box he entered with up near the frame.

"Thank you very much, Picture Picture," Rogers tells the anthropomorphized frame. Continuing the connection with the last item of display, he notes that the lid on his

oatmeal box is on. “But we could take the lid off,” he says smiling, “and how about making some in the kitchen?” Answering his own question to the viewer, he says “sure,” and notes, “we’ve got our lab coat on. We might as well be creative in the kitchen today.” This use of “we” is worth pointing out as it is consistent with all of Rogers’ verbal and nonverbal communication efforts to create the sense that he is actively spending dyadic time with the viewer.

We follow him into the kitchen, where he notes the ingredients we need to make oatmeal are present – oatmeal, water, salt, and a pot. “Who makes the oatmeal most often in your house,” he asks the viewer, making the connection between his on-screen cooking and the viewer’s personal family environment. He grabs a plastic measurement cup and the camera zooms in on his hand pouring the oatmeal into the cup. “There, one cup of oatmeal, and two cups of water,” he says pouring the cup into the pot and heading to the sink to fill the cup with water. “I read that in a cook book,” he giggles as he pours the water into the pan. “It’s part of the fun of cooking you know, pouring water and make all kinds of mess, and something comes out of it...yup, something good.” He fills up another cup of water and, holding the cup a few feet above the pot, pours the water into it while watching with a look of delight. Next, he adds the salt. “It’s sort of a ‘palm of your hand’ portion of salt,” he says as he pours a teaspoon into his palm and shows the viewer, emptying it into the pot.” Finally, he grabs the matches and lights the stove saying, “Now something for big people only – matches.” He clarifies that he says “big people only” because fire is very dangerous. “But you’re getting bigger, everyday,” he says while he stirs the oatmeal. The camera zooms in on the metal spoon as it moves the oats around in the pot of water. Over this close-up, which, I may add, proves quite pleasurable, he sings:

You used to creep and crawl real well  
But then you learned to walk real well  
There was a time you'd coo and cry  
But then you learned to talk and my  
You hardly ever cry, you hardly ever crawl at all  
I like the way you're growing up  
It's fun, that's all

#### CHORUS

You're growing, you're growing  
You're growing in and out  
You're growing, you're growing  
You're growing all about

You're hands are getting bigger now  
Your arms and legs are stronger now  
You even sense your insides grow  
When mom and dad refuse you  
So you're learning how to wait now  
It's great to hope and wait somehow  
I like the way you're growing up  
It's fun, that's all

#### CHORUS

Your friends are getting better now  
They're better every day somehow  
You used to stay at home to play  
But now you even play away  
You do important things now  
Your friends and you do big things now  
I like the way you're growing up  
It's fun, that's all

Some day you'll be a grownup too  
And have some children grow up too  
Then you can love them in and out  
And tell them stories all about  
The times that you were their size  
The times when you found great surprise  
In growing up and they will sing  
It's fun, that's all

#### CHORUS

“You’re sure are growing,” he states at the close of the song. Then he sings the song’s theme substituting the lyrics, “We’re cooking” as he looks back down at the pot, where he continues to stir the oatmeal.

Every subject visited has an appropriate segue and clear moment of both connection and transition. This technique creates a sense of continuity and lessens anxieties caused by sharp and jarring cuts. We then return to the tight shot of the inside of the pot, where the oatmeal-water mixture has transformed from thin to thick. “When the bubbles come all in it, that means it’s boiling,” Rogers says as bubbles begin to form and pop around the edges of the mixture. “Then you let it boil for about a minute.” Rogers continues to stir in silence for a few seconds before we cut to a fuller kitchen shot of him over the stove, stirring. “The oatmeal’s almost ready,” he says. “But after it boils for a while, then you cover it over, take it away from the fire and cover it over. And then it’s ready for your friend.” Here, we cut back to the tight close-up of the inside of the pan, where the oatmeal looks thicker in consistency and nearly done. “See it bubbling?” he says. “There it goes. You’re a good, bubbling oatmeal.” Returning back to the wide shot of Rogers in the kitchen, we see him look into the camera and smile. “Open meal,” he giggles.<sup>100</sup> He closes the segment by turning off the fire and noting that when one turns on the fire, it must always be turned off at the end of cooking. “Now we can let it sit and go to the neighborhood of make-believe,” he says.

Heading back into the living room, Rogers sits down on the chair below Picture Picture and below the train track. He pulls a small notepad from his pocket along with a

---

<sup>100</sup> It is important to note that Julia Child’s French Chef television program, which developed the film language for TV cooking, began its air roughly five years before *MRN* debuted on Pittsburgh’s WQED. It ran on Boston’s WBGH from 1963 to 1973.

pencil as Trolley pulls up beside him with a whistle. “You know, I was just thinking about something as I was making that,” Rogers says, “You know I’ve got a friend who works real well with clay, and his name is Jamie.” Rogers offers that maybe Jamie could come over later since cooking the oatmeal reminded him of playing with clay. Here, another connection is made between persons, objects, and their creative interactions and manipulations. Rogers writes his request for Jamie’s visit on his notepad and asks Trolley if he would deliver his message to Jamie. He vocalizes his note while writing it: “Please come and bring some play clay...Mr. Rogers.” To clarify the stops, Rogers asks Trolley to take us into the ‘NMB’ while “he”<sup>101</sup> is looking for Jamie.

In the ‘NMB,’ Trolley “drops us off” at the castle, where a mime, named “Mime Walker,” stands in conversation with Kind Friday. As the two watch the Trolley pass by, Friday turns to Mime Walker<sup>102</sup> and says, “Yes, that’s our neighborhood Trolley.” The statement serves as another transition into the new scene with the vocalization of the Trolley’s entrance and departure. “Suppose, Mime Walker, you show me how you might be someone who is riding on a trolley,” Friday directs Walker. The scene unfolds into a series of miming requests and demonstrations by Friday and Walker, respectively. Walker, who wears white tights, ballet slippers, a striped long sleeve shirt, and white makeup on his face, in classic mime costume, takes his time in during each demonstration. For the first request, he mimes depositing a coin into an imagined appropriate slot, walks to the back of the imagined “trolley,” reaches up to clasp the imagined “hand rail,” and

---

<sup>101</sup> I have made Trolley a “he” because Rogers has anthropomorphized the object and it does not feel right to call Trolley an “it.”

<sup>102</sup> “Mime Walker” is the famous mime, Jewel Walker. For more on Walker, see Annette Lust, *From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond: Mimes, Pierrots, and Clowns: A Chronicle of the Many Visages of Mime in the Theater* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 171.

then glides his feet along to imitate the trolley's movement. After hearing Friday's second request, that Mime Walker demonstrate a man flying a kite, he reaches both hands out before him to draw in an imagined string. Pretending to battle with the force of the kite as it is carried along in the air by the wind, his torso and hips bend backwards as he digs his feet into the floor and lets the wind pull his arms and torso over and back to its original position. Costa plays dreamlike music on the celeste as Walker follows the kite around in a figure eight motion. Mime Walker's short, yet diligent and sustained miming scenes feel like bodily meditations on simple human action. They have the effect of inspiring feelings of awe, relaxation, and wonder. They invite the viewer to absorb the subtleties in the man's movement, expressions, and sequence. "I feel so strongly that deep and simple is far more essential than shallow and complex," Rogers once told filmmaker Benjamin Wagner.<sup>103</sup> Here, with Mime Walker, *MRN* offers yet another representation of human-object interactions that are easily accessible, relatable, and doable in the world. In this case, the object does not even exist in material form. It is, rather, imagined, yet still played with on a cognitive and bodily level.

Mime Walker continues his playful performance for Friday miming a bird watcher, a hobby that the 'NMB' character Lady Elaine has embraced. Friday relates this information to Walker as he concludes their engagement and Walker, interested in Lady Elaine's new hobby, proceeds to visit her and, Henrietta Pussycat, and X the Owl. Over at the tree that X and Henrietta share, Mime Walker entertains Henrietta's request to mime a cat by pretending to preen himself and drink milk from a bowl. He then pretends, at the instruction and prompting of X, that he is a goldfinch taking a bath. It is a

---

<sup>103</sup> See *Mister Rogers and Me*, directed by Benjamin Wagner and Christofer Wagner (Arlington, VA: PBS, 2010)

delightfully pleasurable scene in which he involves his whole body, moving his arms and legs about to splash water atop an imaginary giant birdbath. After he “flies away” from the bath, Henrietta and X engage in a discussion of the ways that birds and cats bathe and how they differ. Again, verbal connections are always made in order to fully acknowledge and properly realize an action, meditation, and/or drama that ensues. As Henrietta sings “Goldfinch, goldfinch, what do you look like?” we cut back to Rogers sitting in the chair just exactly where he left us before we entered the “NMB.” He picks up where Henrietta left off in the song, “Goldfinch, goldfinch, what do you look like?” The music carries us through from one world to another such that Rogers comes in with no audio break. “Goldfinch, goldfinch, what do you look like? You’re yellow with a black wing and a black hat,” he concludes. He ensures us that, “Sure, Lady Elaine will see a Goldfinch soon,” adding one final verbal layer to the closing of the ‘NMB’ episode.

The final segment begins with a knock at the front door, to which Rogers’ responds by getting out of his chair and verbally wondering if it is Jamie, the friend he referred to at the close of the oatmeal making scene who likes to play with clay. “I wonder if he got out note,” Rogers says as he opens the door and says hello to Jamie. “Hi, I got your note,” Jamie says. Again, repetitive emphasis is used often with verbal affirmations that bring clarity. Rogers notes out loud that Jamie has brought his clay with him and finds a laboratory coat for the boy in the closet. Jamie, who is Rogers’ real son, puts on the coat and the two amble to the kitchen table, where they sit down together with Jamie’s plastic container of clay.

“Oh, you’ve got all sorts of colors here,” Rogers says as he looks inside Jamie’s container. “Yeah, I brought this one along,” he says grabbing two pieces of rolled up

clay. “I was making something and I thought I’d bring it along.” Rogers asks Jamie what he was starting to make and Jamie tells him that he was in the process of making a baseball diamond. He places the two rolled-up pieces on the table and pats them down on the table, forming two sides of the diamond. Rogers asks him if he would provide him with some clay for him to play with and Jamie complies, giving him some yellow clay. “Baseball diamond, huh? Well how’d you think that up?” Rogers asks Jamie. Jamie tells him that he went to a baseball game and smiles bashfully. “Did you enjoy it?” Rogers asks him. “Yup,” Jamie responds. Rogers tells Jamie that he remembers how when Jamie was younger, he used to pound the clay together “like so.” He demonstrates with the clay in his hands. “And now look at you, making baseball diamonds,” he says. “You are really growing.” The camera zooms in on Jamie’s hands working the placement of the clay on the table. He presses a piece in the middle of the diamond he has made into the table. “What’s that in the middle?” Rogers asks. “The pitcher’s mound,” Jamie replies. “The pitcher’s mound,” Rogers repeats declaratively. He then points out each base with his fingers – first base, second base, third base, and home. Above the baseball diamond, we see Jamie’s hands working a piece of darker clay.<sup>104</sup> “Now what are you doing?” Rogers asks. “Making a pitcher and a batter,” Jamie says. “Good – a pitcher and a batter,” Rogers says as Jamie places the pitcher (an upright piece of clay) on the mound. He continues to work with the batter as Costa’s gentle piano continues to add a sense of calm and pleantry to the scene. “Is that the batter?” Rogers asks. “It’s going be,” Jamie replies while finishing molding it with his hands and placing it on home plate.

---

<sup>104</sup> We don’t know the color because the program is in black and white.



Jamie's scene is slowly coming together and transforming from flattened pieces of clay into a baseball diamond, complete with a pitcher and a batter, who stand upright at their proper respective locations. Jamie is maybe seven years of age. His depictions of pitcher and batter are nothing special – they are pieces of clay that have been molded to resemble ever so faintly the figures of human beings with necks, heads, and bodies. Yet somehow, in the process of placing them in accordance with the structure of a baseball diamond, and verbally naming them, the objects have become something more than what they once were. They now symbolize a cultural expression – a baseball game. And although Jamie's craftsmanship is quite basic, one derives a sense of beauty and pleasure in watching the “sculpture” come together as he molds the pieces on the table.

For the first finishing symbolic touch, Jamie adds a long piece of clay to the batter's top half. It is the bat. Then, placing a little ball of clay just past the second base area, he says, “a ball landed right there.” Laughing with Jamie, Rogers says “a ball landed there,” and he points his finger next to the ball. Rogers then shows Jamie what he has made and asks what Jamie thinks it might be. “A birdbath?” Jamie asks. “A birdbath,” Rogers confirms and asks Jamie if he can borrow a bit of dark clay from him to place at the edge of the bath. It represents a bird. Adding further connection to events in the “NMB,” Rogers tells Jamie that the next time he has Mime Walker over, he will ask him to mime some baseball actions. He mimes hitting a ball with an imaginary bat in his hands. Jamie brings the attention back to his baseball display by adding more clay pieces that he says will represent the right fielder and the left fielder. The two then clean up their creations together, placing the clay back into Jamie's container. Rogers tells

Jamie that he will drop him at home on his way to work. They walk into the living room singing “Tomorrow” together.

Tomorrow, tomorrow  
We’ll start the day tomorrow with a song or two  
Tomorrow, tomorrow  
We’ll start the day tomorrow with a smile for you  
‘Til then I hope you’re feeling happy  
‘Till then I hope your day is snappy  
Tomorrow, tomorrow  
It soon will be tomorrow  
And be our day  
We will say a very happy tomorrow to you.

“Thanks for coming to visit me,” Rogers says as walks toward the front door in his suit jacket next to Jamie. “See you tomorrow, bye bye,” he waves as he exits.

As noted in a previous chapter, Rogers learned early on that performing creative acts, in his case playing the piano, could help alleviate the anxiety he felt as a result of isolation and social exclusion. And yet, for creative living, as understood by both Winnicott and Rogers, no special talent is needed.<sup>105</sup> Because creativity originates from a sense of existing, “creativity is the doing that arises out of being.”<sup>106</sup> As Rogers shows throughout his program, creative acts can be engaged in via an endless variety of actions that involve the most accessible of phenomena – e.g. the body, the objects at one’s disposal, social engagement, and the natural world. Songs can be sung that already exist or one can invent her own song. Regular everyday objects can be used in their own utilitarian way or manipulated to create new uses. The emphasis in *MRN* is on anthropocentrism and the power of the human being to make use of what he has to live creatively through cultural discovery.

---

<sup>105</sup> Abrams, “Transitional Phenomena,” 112.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that *MRN* episodes from the first season of the program are anchored in the material, social, and imaginary existence and possibilities of artisanal and everyday objects. The episodes introduce the viewer to a world made by man, in which objects are a site for human interaction and creative transformation. When nature comes into this purview, it is also presented as an object of contemplation and knowledge, as in the case of the oatmeal episode. When, for example, oatmeal is presented, it is rendered as an object that has a story. This story links it to its point of origin, natural and/or manmade. The story or stories show how the object is related organically or functionally to people. For example, the *Picture Picture* film details the cultivation, harvest, packaging, and transport of the oats and Rogers' transforms the packaged oats into oatmeal through the act of cooking. These relations imbue the objects with a story that conveys to the viewer a world of relationships.

Objects are thus presented in their different manifestations and their many possibilities. As such, in each show, the object is introduced not only as an instrument of play, but perhaps more importantly as a site of discovery and understanding for the (child) viewer. Each object therefore holds the possibility for creative transformation, several possibilities of which are imagined, discussed, and enacted on the program.

In my analysis, I show that the indispensable and defining presence of an object in each episode constitutes an anthropology of objects. In fact, I have in effect done a meta-anthropological study of Rogers' anthropology of objects. "Look at all these moving

parts,” Rogers says while viewing the intricate workings of the piano.<sup>107</sup> While Clifford Geertz constructs his “thick description” through written notes on a page, Rogers transposes his anthropological observations through the medium of television. As such, he has the privilege of utilizing the oral and the visual, communication forms that Walter Ong identified as the primary and thus closer to the human life world, to perform his anthropological pedagogy.<sup>108</sup> Using these communication tools essential to the television medium (secondary orality), Rogers mounts an inquiry into the object. He then finds an informant (usually a neighbor or visiting artisan/artist) to dialogue with about the object and its creative possibilities. This move works to assist the viewer in learning not only about the object but its place in the social. In its enactment of this search for an object origins and relationship to human history, *MRN*, as exemplified by its national, intergenerational popularity, its thirty-four years run on public television, and its plethora of viewer mail, was found deeply pleasurable by viewers. Indeed, Bloom’s theories that posit a universal human interest in objects’ origins, history, and essence, help us to understand the power in Rogers’ programming.

Rogers weaves his analysis of objects starting with an introductory segment in which he introduces the object directly to his viewer. ‘Look what I brought in today,’ he begins. He often then brings another person into the scene or introduces a film about the object in order to discuss its origin, the ways that it is made, and how it works. Next, he transitions the object into the “NMB,” where a second anthropology of the object ensues. Here, the object is inserted into a world of desire and control and constitutes a point of origin for many of the dramas that characterize the realm of King Friday.

---

<sup>107</sup> “Episode 0111,” *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, 22 July, 1968.

<sup>108</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 133-34.

In relation to this anthropology of object, which I have found to be constitutive of the program, one could argue that, as Grant Noble has posited, *MRN* seeks to restore the visibility of the essential relations and workings of a society, a function Noble suggests that broadcast television does for alienated moderns. In many respects we can see how Rogers seeks to replicate a village-life environments for his viewers in respect to the quality of objects (artisanal), the continuity of social relationships, the stability of spaces and places, and a strong sense of origins and general fluidity. As Baudrillard theorizes, such nostalgia for origins and obsession with authenticity is highly present among members of modern society, who live in a capitalist world in which “all that is solid melts into air.”

Rogers, in his quest for locating an object’s origins, connecting it to the social present, and transforming it by the work of his own human hands, demonstrates Baudrillard’s theory of moderns’ interest in antiques and collection. Interestingly, he uses concepts in psychoanalysis to analyze this phenomenon and identifies in these object-oriented affinities a kind of narcissistic regression in which the subject “beats a path back” to the mother – to “an earlier age, to ‘divinity,’ to nature, to primitive knowledge, and so forth.”<sup>109</sup> From Winnicott’s perspective, this process is indeed the work of life (play for the child) and the location of culture. The object is a symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother) and it can be located at the place in both space and time where and when the mother is transitioning from being merged with the infant to an object to be perceived. The object thus symbolizes “the union of two now separate things, baby and mother, at the point in time and space of the initiation of their

---

<sup>109</sup> Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 76.

state of separateness.”<sup>110</sup> In play, the action that occurs in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object), cultural experience unfolds with what Winnicott calls “creative living. According the Winnicott, potential space is created “only *in relation to a feeling of confidence* on the part of the baby, that is, confidence related to the dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements.” Thus, Rogers’ program, through its emphasis on trust and mutuality, object relations, and social and spatial continuity, appears intent on helping the young individual viewer learn to venture into the *potential space* where she can may safely explore and manipulate the world and thus become a healthy social and cultural being.

---

<sup>110</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 97.

## CHAPTER 4:

### “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”:

#### Intergenerational Dialogics in *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* Viewer Mail

In a 1969 letter written to Fred Rogers, a mother discusses how her young son, Peter, a viewer of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* (hereafter *MRN*), pretends to be the program’s host by donning a bathrobe and walking about the house singing his favorite *MRN* song, “You’ve Got To Do It.” She thanks Rogers and expresses her wish that other shows “have the inventive to bring the same type of program into [our] home instead of four hours of cartoons and those terrible Three Stooges.” In another 1969 letter, a mother praises Rogers’ “quality of instruction,” his “excellent approach to all aspects of a child’s life,” and the puppets’ “real-life experiences.” “Whenever Daddy gets home early,” she continues, “he joins us [in viewing *MRN*]. Often we talk about people on your show for days afterward,” she writes.

From the opening of each *MRN* program, Fred Rogers, the host, presents an invitation to conversation with his viewers. The letters he received demonstrate the efficacy of this invitational tone in the respectful and conversational manner in which they address “Mister Rogers.” Such correspondence reaffirms Rogers’ attempts to elicit the implicit dialogical dynamics of communication. In this regard, Mikhail Bakhtin’s sense of a dialogic situation in which “the word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented to a future answer-word,”<sup>1</sup> often characterized as “answerability”<sup>2</sup> is

---

<sup>1</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1986), 672.

<sup>2</sup> See Jeffrey Murray, “Bakhtinian Answerability and Levinasian Responsibility: Forging a Fuller Dialogical Communicative Ethics,” *Southern Communication Journal* 65.2 (2009): 133-50.

useful. In this chapter, I examine viewer letters written to Fred Rogers during the 1970s and 80s, from the perspective of four scholars of dialogic communication ethics – Mikhail Bakhtin, Roger Burggraeve, Paulo Freire, and Martin Buber – in order to show how Rogers’ dialogical rhetorical stance, techniques, and strategies resonated with viewers. Burggraeve’s conceptualization of ethical emotionality, which he defines as “passion through and for the other”<sup>3</sup> or “heteronomous affection,”<sup>4</sup> by the vulnerable face of the other”<sup>5</sup> constitutes a rich theoretical framework for analyzing *MRN* viewer letters and lends an important Christian ethical communication framework to these dynamic texts. Burggraeve’s concept of ethical emotionality dovetails with Bakhtin’s dialogical theorization of the conversational moment – a moment which “provokes an answer, anticipates it, and structures itself in the answer’s direction.”<sup>6</sup> Freire’s dialogic-relations method of learning, rooted in an understanding of dialogue as “an existential necessity,”<sup>7</sup> further elucidates the humanizing and transformative nature of dialogue as witnessed in the viewer letters. As an educator of Latin America’s poor and proponent of Liberation Theology, Freire’s scholarship adds further perspective on dialogical ethics and social pedagogy within the spheres of education and ethics. Finally, Buber’s phenomenological understanding of dialogue as a process in which people come to being in relation to each other, offers us additional critical depth in assessing the processes taking place in the “between” space of the conversational interactions.

---

<sup>3</sup> Roger Burggraeve, “A Holistic Values Education: Emotionality, Rationality and Meaning,” EFTRE European Conference, Järvenpää 2004, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 69.



In the following analysis, I argue that *MRN* employs a dialogical communication ethic wherein viewers of the program feel compelled to respond to the call of the program's primary figure or host, "Mister Rogers," through what was, at the time, the dominant medium of letter writing. Rogers invites his viewers to spend time with him at his "television house." He refers to each program not by the industry term "episode," but rather as a "television visit," implying an interactive meeting between him and his viewer in real time. As such, Rogers reframes his program as an experience of sharing existence, an event that calls us into dialogue, "not only with other human beings, but also with the symbolic environment we encode and decode to configure our notion of "the world."<sup>8</sup> As Michael Holquist writes in his work on Bakhtin and Dialogism, "the world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity."<sup>9</sup> If dialogue is an essential component of existence, as Bakhtin posits, what does it mean for Rogers to ground his television program in a dialogical communication ethos? What communication practices does he employ televisually to achieve this sort of interpersonal exchange? How does this dialogical framework affect Rogers' viewers? Given the dialogical nature of the program and the deeply interpersonal affective tone of the viewer letters, is "audience" the proper term for *MRN* viewers?<sup>10</sup> Finally, what relevance does this dialogical analysis hold for today's children's media and its producers?

---

<sup>8</sup> Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> It is useful to note that after completing the necessary coursework for the completion of his Masters of Divinity Degree from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, academic authorities at the Seminary were hesitant about granting Rogers' degree since he did not have a formal congregation. To this concern, Rogers responded that he considered his television program to be his ministry. He was ordained by the Presbyterian Church with a charge to serve children and families through television.

In the past, prominent industry agents and communication scholars viewed twentieth-century mass communication technologies of radio, film, and television through the lens of the linear, transmission model of communication, in which a sender creates a message that travels uninterrupted to millions of intended receivers. Rogers was before his time in his analysis of television as part and parcel of a transactional communication process. In contrast to the transmission model, in which communication is viewed as something one person does to another, the transactional model suggests that communication is “not only something that we engage in (or create) together, but [also] an experience that affects us” such that we are changed.<sup>11</sup> The transactional view further suggests that each communicator is at once a sender and receiver, emphasizing the all-encompassing nature of communication as a symbolic production of reality as identified by James Carey. This nuanced understanding of communication was also discussed by Hans Gadamer, who posited that “meanings were not *reproduced* by ‘receivers’ but *produced* collaboratively and dialogically by communicators who are simultaneously and prototypically speakers and listeners.”<sup>12</sup>

Meticulous in his creation of a dialogical communication environment in which calls to reflection, imagination, and understanding take place within a highly ritualized visual and oral communication reality, Rogers, a student of child development and psychology, aimed to create a safe space wherein a variety of issues could be discussed on a dialogical level through the new mass communication medium of television. As

---

<sup>11</sup> Jack Gareis and Ellen Cohn, *Communication as Culture: An Introduction to the Communication Process* (Dubuque City, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2008), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Rob Anderson et al., “Texts and Contexts of Dialogue,” in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, ed. Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 6.

such, Carey's ritual view of communication offers a particularly enlightening lens from which to view *MRN* as it emphasizes communication as a "sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality" and "is linked to terms such as "sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith."<sup>13</sup> The letters written to Rogers provide evidence that viewers of the program, through their daily, ritualized participation<sup>14</sup> in *MRN*'s symbolically produced televisual reality, developed a relationship with Rogers in which they felt compelled to personally and formally respond to his dialogical prompts/call to connect and think through issues and ideas together.

In his groundbreaking 1975 book, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, Erik Barnouw argues that television has bypassed the traditional roles of parent, teacher, priest, grandparent, etc., in its power to transmit values to children. In the same year, Grant Noble suggested that each exposure to, for example a newsreel, "teaches a 'how to behave model.'"<sup>15</sup> More recently Dorothy and Jerome Singer, in their *Handbook of Children and the Media*, identify the popular media as educators and socializers of growing children. This perspective, now recognized in axiomatic form as a given in both academia and American society-at-large, is one that Fred Rogers recognized when he began his work with the then-new medium in the 1950s. In "Children's: TV: What The Church Can Do About It," Rogers wrote that since the television set is bought and placed in the home by parents, "it's as if the parents were

---

<sup>13</sup> James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 18.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that Rogers' viewers do not simply *view MRN*. Rather, they actively *participate* in the program as a result of its dialogical nature.

<sup>15</sup> Grant Noble, *Children In Front of the Small Screen* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975), 37.

bringing – and condoning – what their children see on the set.” Barnouw, writing in 1975, appears to share Rogers’ view of television’s growing authority when he asserts that the medium has quickly become “the dominant shared experience in the modern world.”<sup>16</sup> In that same document, Rogers expresses questions whether, “our children (and the children whom the church has never been able to reach) [are] being fed a slick, stimulated sound-tracked trash 1,000 hours a year while our schools try to teach the opposite with posters, crayons, and paste in one-tenth the time?” If television had, by the mid-1970s, become *the* dominant shared experience of modern life, which many scholars from Dorothy and Jerome Singer, Jean Baudrillard, James Carey, John Fiske and a host of other intellectuals so assert, what can we learn from Rogers’ ethically and psychologically grounded, dialogical communication practices in regards to raising and teaching children?

Addressing an audience at Yale University in 1972, Rogers decries the values of those concerned with the business of the television at the expense of the quality of content produced. With a particular concern for the ways that television viewing impacts human development, especially child development, Rogers states that “within the family – and television is within the family – we need to communicate the worth of the simple, the necessity of being honest – and the uniqueness as well as the relationship of all human beings.”<sup>17</sup> As we discussed in the first chapter, Rogers and child development specialist Dr. Margaret McFarland felt strongly that television programming was destined to become part of the family communication dynamic of the home. Rogers saw *MRN* as embedded in the family communication culture of every home and aptly named his

---

<sup>16</sup> Ralph E. Hanson, *Mass Communication: Living in a Media World*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 236.

<sup>17</sup> Fred Rogers, “Yale,” *Television Professionals Looks At Children’s Programs*, New Haven, CT, 16 Oct. 1972, BOX EU3, Fred Rogers Archive, Latrobe, PA.

production company, Family Communications, Inc.<sup>18</sup> More than thirty years later, Singer and Singer ask the question, “What does it mean for children’s development to be growing up in a milieu in which popular reading literature and especially electronic sources of input compete daily with what children learn from parents, family, or teachers, the ‘live’ people around them?”<sup>19</sup> Though Singer and Singer address this question in their most recent *Handbook of Children and the Media*, this question has been debated since the mid-1950s, when television, the first oral/audio electronic media device created for fixture status in the home, had become a fixture of American family life.

Most of the research on television and children has centered upon concerns about the “healthy” development of children in relation to the medium. Indeed, the ‘healthy’ development of children was the primary motivator and ultimate concern of Fred Rogers and his work as he stated in his testimony before the Senate in 1967,

I’ve worked in the field of child development for six years now, trying to understand the inner needs of children....and I feel that if we in public television can make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, then we will have done a great service for mental health.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, scholars of children and the media have also written extensively on the ways in which commercial values have impacted children’s subjectivities, emphasizing the political economic foundations of the television industry and the primary goal of delivering audiences to advertisers.<sup>21</sup> With the advent of digital media and its growing

---

<sup>18</sup> Note that Family Communications Inc., founded by Fred Rogers in 1971, became The Fred Rogers Company seven years after Fred Rogers’ death in 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, eds. *Handbook of Children and the Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers, “Senate Statement on PBS Funding,” 1 May, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Norma Odom Pecora, *The Business of Children’s Entertainment* (New York: Guildford Press, 1998); Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York: New Press, 2004); Julie Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

ubiquity in the lives of both children and adults, demand for studies on the influence of media on children continues to grow and the studies now include a wide range of both traditional and novel analytical perspectives including uses and gratifications, cognitive function effects, socialization effects, reception and audience studies, political economy of media, etc. These approaches to understanding children's television and its role in influencing individual and collective consciousness are useful and have influenced my understanding of the complexities of televisual-societal problematics. This inquiry into *MRN* viewer letters and the dialogical nature of the correspondence, however, addresses the phenomenon from the perspective of communication theories on dialogue and communication ethics in order to delve deeper into the complexities of Mister Rogers' resounding parasocial relationship with viewers.<sup>22</sup> My method of analysis is interpretive hermeneutics, an approach I find particularly appropriate and probing for dealing with the complexities of discursive expression.

Ronald C. Arnett, Janie M. Harden Fritz, and Leeanne M. Bell have identified the process of dialogue as first principle in postmodern communication ethics. Their work on communication ethics and dialogue puts forth the idea that in a postmodern, global world, characterized in many ways by difference dialogue becomes a fundamental ethical good and one that must be employed in everyday life. Arnett cites Melissa Cook's work (2005) on how "views of the good respond differently to particular concerns in given historical moments" as useful in regards to his assessment of the dialogical ethical imperative in postmodernity.<sup>23</sup> "The postmodern moment," writes Arnett, "is an opportunity for those

---

<sup>22</sup> Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19.3 (1956): 215-29.

<sup>23</sup> Robert C. Arnett et al., *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009) 11.

wanting to learn from difference.”<sup>24</sup> Further, in response to the works of Robert Bellah and Robert Putnam that detail the growing isolation and alienation experienced in postmodern American society, Arnett expresses deep concern for the very notion of ethics and human survival. In these developments, encapsulated in Philip Slater’s 1970 book title *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, Arnett identifies a very serious “error of the moment,” which he characterizes as “the temptation of assuming that we can function without regard for the other.”<sup>25</sup> Arnett, a prominent scholar in dialogic ethics, emphasizes the works of four philosophers – Martin Buber, Hans Gadamer, Paulo Freire, and Hannah Arendt – as foundational in the shaping of understanding dialogue.

Rob Anderson, Leslie Baxter, and Kenneth A. Cissna, in their 2004 edited survey on the subject, *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, identify the dialogical theories of Buber, Gadamer, Habermas, and Bakhtin as touchstone works for communication scholars focused on dialogue and its theoretical variations. The conceptual turn toward dialogue provides us with a rich and fertile perspective from which to analyze and theorize about mass media texts, such as *MRN*, which is rooted in an interpersonal communication ethic aimed at transcending the emotional and broader psychological space between screen actors and viewers. Though primarily focused on analyzing the viewer letter correspondence of the program from a dialogical communication perspective, this chapter builds communication bridges<sup>26</sup> between a variety of sub-fields including interpersonal communication, childhood culture, television studies, mass communication, and communication ethics.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> See Gabriela Nunez, “Reading Jose Maria Arguedas’ Letter: Building Communication Bridges in Mid-twentieth Century Peruvian Society” (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2015).

Viewer letters are crucial to Rogers' sense of dialoging with his audience because he responded to each one. That his company retained all correspondence received during *MRN*'s 33 years of programming testifies to the unusual importance they hold for Rogers' communication project at large. As a 2012 Fred Rogers Memorial Scholar, I carried out original research for this paper at the Fred Rogers Archives, located at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. There, I read and sorted through hundreds of letters written between the years 1968 and 1983. Letters for analysis were selected according to rhetorical patterns of affective expression and communication exchange in content and/or style. The sample of letters analyzed in this chapter are representative of a multitude of intergenerational and gendered viewer letters characterized by affect display, self-disclosure, self-discovery, and an ethos of gratitude.

The abundant viewer letters written to Rogers during this period reveal a remarkable consistency in their collective thematic quality and constitute a field of study about the dialogical relationship between the program's host, the historical Fred Rogers, and *MRN*'s audience. Most viewers appear to write to express an emotional and affective identification with Rogers, as well as to convey a sincere appreciation for how the show sparks both their curiosities and their family conversations, as was Rogers' intention. "I'm not that interested in 'mass communications,'" he once said, "I am much more interested in what happens between this person and the one watching. The space between the television set and that person who's watching is very holy ground."<sup>27</sup> My research reveals that Rogers deploys television as a dialogical medium in which the active

---

<sup>27</sup> Fred Rogers Company website, "About Us," accessed 1 July, 2013, <http://www.fredrogers.org/about/>.



understanding of the audience is as important as the messages communicated, and his “audience” responds to his invitational rhetoric in kind.

What is also remarkable about this letter collection is the intergenerational and gendered diversity amongst the viewers that include mothers, children, teenagers, seniors, and fathers. I engage in an underlying discussion about communication across the lifespan as I examine the dialogical communication ethos resonant in the correspondence. In this chapter, I will analyze letters from a variety of letter writers – young adults, mothers, professionals, and fathers from the lens of communication ethics. The letters I have selected for analysis are representative of the larger body of intergenerational letters that feature expressions of affect, interpersonal relationship, self-disclosure, and dialogical learning at their center.

The letters that teens and young adults (YAs) wrote to “Mister Rogers” are often tinged with a hue of childhood lament and a desire to reconnect. YAs often express a feeling of embarrassment for writing to their “television friend” from childhood, yet continue to exclaim their deep affection for Rogers and for the meaningful role he played, and in some cases still plays, in their lives. Sometimes the teens seek Rogers’ advice or an answer to a question with which they are struggling.<sup>28</sup>

The emotional flow that emerges in these lettered expressions is notable in its relationship to the dialogical quality of address. Most of the writers appear to place themselves almost immediately in intimate conversation and relationship with Rogers and, self-reflexively, with themselves. They take us with them on an emotional journey in

---

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of letters that reproduce a similar tone in correspondence with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, see Robert S. McElvaine, ed., *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

which they first expose vulnerable feelings of embarrassment and/or shame, and then shift toward a tone of self-acceptance and reassurance, as if reminding themselves that in conversation with Rogers they are in a safe and secure space that is welcoming and free of judgment. Then, reassured of the existence of this safe space, they tend to exclaim their appreciation of Rogers' presence in their young lives and often seek his counsel for personal dilemmas or dramas.

### **Recognizing, Reuniting, and Reconciling – Dialoging with Young Men**

In his February 11, 1982 letter<sup>29</sup> to “Mr. Rogers,” Brooklynite Glenn Greenwald writes that “seven years ago, I used to watch you every day on channel 13 [i.e., New York’s WNET] and would sing along with you as you welcomed me into your neighborhood.” He tells Rogers he will turn thirteen-years-old in a few months and that he recently stumbled upon “your show.” Glenn reveals that while catching the final five minutes of the program he found himself wondering if Rogers remembered him. “You seemed to be looking right at me,” he writes, “and your last words were ‘I like you just the way you are.’” Glenn recognizes this line from watching the program as a child and recalls that Rogers always said these words while leaving his house and ending the program. “It really took me back,” he continues, exclaiming that he is a graduate of “your program” and that he “is not sorry” about it.

Clearly connecting with his inner child through the friendly figure of “Mister Rogers,” Glenn’s letter expresses both affection for his former self and also, at the end of the letter, a hint of shame for expressing those affections. As a thirteen-year-old boy, he

---

<sup>29</sup> Glenn Greenwald to Rogers, 11 Feb. 1982, Folder 5, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive, Latrobe, PA

likely feels that the sensitive and vulnerable young child who adoringly watched *MRN*, is no longer a part of his more experienced and grownup, teenage-male self. And yet, in the statement, “I am a graduate of your show and I am not sorry that I am,” he first expresses pride and then quickly moves to reject any shame others might want to assign to this statement of association with Rogers and his program.

Most interesting for this inquiry is Glenn’s confession that while revisiting the show several years after watching it routinely as a five-year-old, he finds himself wondering if Rogers recognizes him. As if engaged in a reunion with a significant person in his childhood life, Glenn relates to Rogers on an interpersonal level. Indeed, Rogers has expressed his interest in television not within the realm of “mass communications” but rather in the interpersonal communication that it allows. In a recorded dialogue between Rogers and his professional mentor, child development professor Margaret McFarland, a primary consultant for the program, she tells him that “the real difference between your program and most television for children is that it is less a show for children and more of real communication with them.” This is the reason, she says, that when the children meet Mister Rogers in person at various events “they run up to you and throw their arms around your legs and call you ‘my Mister Rogers’ and anticipate that you will recognize them as they recognize you.”<sup>30</sup> McFarland’s observation reveals not only how familiar Rogers feels to these viewers such that they feel comfortable to physically embrace his person, but also how “real” and established his relationship with them must be prior to experiencing a person-to-person meeting.

---

<sup>30</sup> Judy Rubin, trailer for “Lessons From Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood,” see Expressive Media Inc. website, 3 February 2015, <http://www.expressivemedia.org/f15.html#>.

Writing in May of 1981, Greg Williams begins his six-page letter to Rogers with a caveat: “Dear Mister Rogers, I don’t usually write fan letters but I feel like I owe you one.”<sup>31</sup> He then informs Rogers that he is an English Education major at the University of Illinois and about to enter the teaching field. “Through the years,” he writes, “I have managed to stay a devoted viewer.” Greg is now twenty-one years old and presumes that he currently views *MRN* in order to learn from Rogers’ teaching methods, as well as “the relationships [Rogers] developed with each television friend.” Notably, Greg uses Rogers’ language here, “television friend,” as opposed to the more generic “viewer,” demonstrating the longevity and dedication of his “relationship” with the program and with Mister Rogers.

Greg informs Rogers that he wants to teach at the secondary level and asks him if the methods for working with younger children are similar. “I can only hope for as much sincerity and patience and love as you have for children,” he writes. “And besides learning from you, I still enjoy your program. There is nothing better for uptight nerves due to a hectic pace or difficult class than spending a half hour in your neighborhood.” It is here, in Greg’s reflection on watching the program as a college student that he engages in an analytical examination of his motives for adult viewing. For one, he notes, it offers him a space of relief from the fast pace of young adult, student life and its challenges. Then, branching out of his self-examination, he turns toward the leisure practices and coping strategies of his peers. “Feeling good, being happy,” he writes in reference to the program’s values, “is so much better than all these kids who only find peace in drugs or alcohol.”

---

<sup>31</sup> Greg Williams to Rogers, 8 May, 1981, Folder 14, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

It is really sad. I am constantly around that problem here on campus and I can only wish that they will somehow discover the beauty of nature or in another human being. That is where true happiness lies.

In writing his letter to Rogers, Greg discovers the benefits of his viewing of *MRN* and intuitively that the program has a therapeutic value that can be extended to groups of people. Although he does not label it as such, Greg finds the viewing process calming and nurturing, and, as such, a healthy release from the stresses of the college work load and culture. *MRN*, he writes, inspires “good feelings” and a “happiness of being” within him. As Greg realizes the rewards of watching a thirty-minute episode of *MRN*, he shifts his gaze from self to peer, expressing sadness and concern that others engage with drugs and alcohol in a similar, yet misguided attempt to find relief. Indeed, alcohol and drug use enable people to feel defended from rather than confident in their engagement with the other. Greg’s concern for his peers illustrates the points that both Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas make in respect to the responsive construction of the “I,” which “moves from individualism to responsible attentiveness of the Other and to the historical situation.”<sup>32</sup> Greg moves from evaluating his own visit to the “Neighborhood” to concern regarding his “neighbors” in the University of Illinois college community. His relatively quick move from self to other underscores a cognitive shift motivated by the ethical imperative to think about his experience in relation to others.

Greg begins a new paragraph noting that as the son of a United Methodist minister, he was “raised in a good religious environment.” He reveals that he recently renewed his faith and “strengthened [his] commitment to God” while admitting that he had become distracted by schoolwork and personal matters. “I guess it is a hazard of

---

<sup>32</sup> Arnett, “A Dialogic Ethic ‘Between’ Buber and Levinas,” in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, 76.

being in a university environment,” he writes. “Again, your simplicity and freshness pulled me through a few of those rough times.” Here, Greg’s letter moves deeper into personal spaces of struggle and vulnerability. He refers to the culture of college life as “hazardous,” though in this section it is not the perils of drug and alcohol use that pose a threat but rather work and personal endeavors that have taken up too much of his attention. Interestingly, he credits Rogers with providing moments of “simplicity” and “freshness” that helped him carry on the struggle. This alludes to Rogers’ understanding of the need to provide a space free of the bombardment of life’s demands in order to allow people to return to a “simple,” spiritual center that nourishes. The constant dispersal that is characteristic of modern life brings about a sense of confusion, which Greg finds safe haven from via Rogers program. In the *Neighborhood*, there is a sense of harmony and simplicity that provides relief from Greg’s pressures and also from the destructive behavior of his peers.

Moving from the broader picture into more specific personal detail, Greg continues, “I’d like to especially thank you for your week devoted to divorce.” He reveals that his parents divorced two years prior and that the programs “helped [him] to reflect on that difficult time.” As the oldest of three siblings, Greg noticed that his sisters were feeling “the same things the little girl and Prince Tuesday were feeling – guilt, frustration, confusion.” He writes that as a result of the experience of watching the week-long *MRN* programs on divorce, the relationships among him, his mother, and sisters have “grown stronger.” Further, after a period of feeling very angry with his father, the two have “renewed” their relationship. “It will probably never be quite the same but we are communicating at least,” he writes. With poised maturity, Greg holds both the grief he

feels over the loss of his former relationship with his father and a hopeful emotion tied to developing a new communication space between father and son.

This segment of the letter shows Greg sharing with Rogers (and himself) the emotional processing that he has done, crediting *MRN* with helping him and his family work through the deep social ruptures of divorce and the painful emotional consequences of this familial breakdown. His prose is a testimony to the success of the program in helping viewers to identify, explore, and manage their feelings as a result of parasocial dialogue<sup>33</sup> and theatrical narrative. Greg credits a conversation between “Neighborhood of Make Believe” puppets on divorce with helping him and his sisters put a name on the emotions they were struggling with as a result of the divorce. As readers, we can assume that when Greg notes that the programs strengthened the bonds among him, his mother, and sisters, these family members watched the programs together and discussed them afterwards. We can see here the ways that television programming extends and circulates ideas into the family communication environment. Thus, the dialogical aspects of *MRN* prompted and assisted the family in “reflecting” (to use Greg’s word) on the complex and difficult relational and emotional realities that arise from divorce.

In his 1984 article, “On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communication,” Horace M. Newcomb employs Bakhtin’s linguistic communication theory and the struggle for meaning in mediated texts. He offers a reading of “Discourse and the Novel” that can be used to study the dialogical aspects of other forms of communication, specifically electronic, mass communication. Newcomb notes that Bakhtin’s argument for the dialogic aspects of the novel is rooted in a recognition and examination of the myriad

---

<sup>33</sup> See Horton and Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*.

languages embedded in any given social language. The term Bakhtin uses to encapsulate this phenomenon is “heteroglossia.” “Within this communication polyglot we know as society,” Newcomb writes, “then every utterance that goes out from speaker to listener, from writer to reader, from creators to audience, is bound into a system of multiple meanings.”<sup>34</sup> Within expressive artistic forms such as a novel or a television program there exists an added layer of complexity because such utterances are attached to the realities of the character, or the narrator who speaks. “Every such representation is an ‘image of a language,’ and thus the image of an entire way of life, an ideological system required to interact with other systems in social dialogue.” As such, all of these ‘voices’ are “woven into the dialogue that forms the work as a process.”

Newcomb notes that the purpose of the analyst or critic is thus not merely to unravel the text, but to recognize that all forms of communication are inherently dialogical in nature.<sup>35</sup> Though the author of the text may aim to establish a “hegemony of intention,” that attempt will never result in total success due to the fact that in addition to the interaction of languages and words to form a new totality, lies the process of reception. That is to say that each viewer brings with him a similar complex structure of meaning-making to his reception of the program. “Each listener, each reader, each viewer brings a similar sort of complexity to the reception of communication, brings a range of contexts in which the ‘word’ is received and made part of the receiver’s world.”<sup>36</sup> Recall in the second chapter of this dissertation the story about Rogers’ janitor friend Jeff, who describes learning about the death of JFK Jr. on television by making connections to his

---

<sup>34</sup> Horace M. Newcomb, “On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communication,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1.1 (1984): 39.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 40.



own family. Rogers tells this story to show his keen awareness of the fact that viewers bring their own understandings of the world (heteroglossia) and experiential meaning-making practices to the act of program reception, creating a dialogical process of transactional communication. “Clearly, it is this ‘social atmosphere of the word’ that is at work in the reception of mass-mediated content,” writes Newwcomb.<sup>37</sup> Here, Bakhtin’s beautiful metaphor of the ray of light illuminates Rogers’ own conception of the act of communication. Bakhtin compares the message to a ray of light, a ray-word that enters “an atmosphere filled with alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle.”<sup>38</sup>

Greg goes on to tell Rogers about his own artistic interests and pursuits, which include song writing, poetry, short-story writing, and community theater. He is curious about Rogers’ current production of show and inquires about taking part in the creation of one. He shares that his favorite film directors are Alfred Hitchcock and Woody Allen and that he enjoys making Super 8 sound movies in the stylings of his choice directors. He writes that “probably the most rewarding experience I’ve had was being a day camp counselor at Snow Mountain Ranch, a YMCA family camp in the Colorado Rockies.” He credits this experience, working with youth from ages three to eighteen, with inspiring him to work during the coming summer at a camp in Champaign.

“I really didn’t plan on telling you this much about myself or asking about a job,” Greg concludes. “But I would very much like to have you keep me in mind.” He asks

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 277.

Rogers for any advice he has to offer on methods of disciplining, and closes by thanking him for “all the pleasure and guidance you have brought me for the past thirteen years. It is nice to know that I am special. And you are too.”

Greg begins his letter by telling Rogers that writing “fan letters” is not an act he usually engages in, but that he feels that he “owes” Rogers one. This language of obligation is interesting in light of the various gestures of friendship and interpersonal connection he strives to make throughout the letter. It is likely that Greg’s feeling of obligation to reach out to Rogers, personally, arises from the fact that he feels that Rogers has offered his friendship to him over the course of many years. “I have literally grown up with your program,” Greg continues, conveying the significant temporal consistency of his exposure to the show. Indeed, he writes of “running home from school each day to watch you,” revealing the everyday presence of Rogers in his young life. This anecdote points toward the unique nature of the *MRN*’s para-social functioning in regards to its everyday showing and its thirty-three-year lifespan. The consistency of this “visitation” points towards an inevitable development of relationship between the viewer and the program’s host, especially considering the unfluctuating dialogical and interpersonal style of the primary actor.

In their essay, “Dialogic Listening: Sculpting Mutual Meanings,” John Stewart and Milt Thomas describe their rediscovery of the *productive* quality of interpersonal communication. They note that their listening is focused less on “reproducing what is ‘inside’ the other person and more on co-producing, with the other person, mutual meanings between [them].”<sup>39</sup> If Greg has been engaged in co-productive meaning making

---

<sup>39</sup> John Stewart and Milt Thomas, “Dialogic Listening: Sculpting Mutual Meanings,” in *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Stewart (New York: McGraw Hill Inc., 1995), 185.

with Rogers on a regular basis for a number of years (Greg cites thirteen years), then it is no wonder that his first “real” communicative response to Rogers begins with an expressed feeling of obligation (think of Bakhtin’s notion of “answerability”) to write to him. Moreover, it is no wonder, although it comes as somewhat of a surprise to Greg, that he shares so much of himself with Rogers – “I really didn’t plan on telling you this much about myself.” Such phenomena reveal that processes of friendship formation appear to be present in Greg’s communiqué and speak to Rogers’ characterization of each viewer as a “television friend.”

Let us take a look at this phrase, “television friend,” in light of the various gestures at play in Greg’s letter. Notably, Rogers does not refer to his viewers as “friends” alone. Although the motion towards this affective and personal relationship, i.e., friendship, is made here, it is significantly altered and delimited by the qualifier, “television.” Indeed, the phrase “television friend” indicates both Rogers’ efforts to transcend the mass medium’s limitations and simultaneously acknowledge them. Greg, who after years of relating to Rogers through the process of viewing, clearly intends to break down the fourth wall barrier between himself and someone whom he has grown close to and yet has never communicated with outside of his own inner dialogical thinking. Thus, writing to Rogers appears to be an attempt to experience “the substantial mutual personal involvement”<sup>40</sup> that occurs between real friends. While Greg expresses his appreciation for the care and attention he has felt from Rogers over the years—a care that has “built up on a basis of trust, knowledge, and intimacy” constitutive of friendship—his letter strives to make himself known to Rogers in an act of reciprocity. In

---

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence A. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 44.

fact, the more he reaches out to share himself with Rogers through the written word, the deeper he moves into his vulnerable emotional spaces. Greg's willingness, one might even say unabashed eagerness, to share his inner thoughts and feelings with Rogers is illustrative of the "realness" of their imagined friendship. Greg writes to Rogers, therefore, to rectify the one-sided reality of their "relationship," acknowledging the para-social characteristics of it and striving to move beyond the virtuality of it.

The ease with which Greg approaches Rogers, not so much as a father figure, but as a mentor-like friend, is remarkable and yet not at all uncommon in *MRN* viewer letters. The theme of reconnecting with an old friend pervades correspondence from young adults in particular, as they seek to engage in acts of friendship development that they were unable to enact via real communication as child viewers. In their discussion on the nature of friendship and its evolution, Mara Adelman et al. identify six dimensions that she and her co-authors have determined offer a fairly comprehensive perspective on relational development. These dimensions are useful for thinking about the rhetorical dynamics in these letters in relation to the phenomena of human friendship.

The first dimension of developing personal relationships that Adelman et al. identify is an increase in "intimacy and emotional attachment."<sup>41</sup> As noted earlier, Greg clearly feels this sense of intimacy and attachment as already present between him and Rogers. The strong sense of safety, closeness, and secure attachment he feels toward Rogers is what allows him to open up and share his own personal vulnerabilities with him. As we have discussed, Rogers intended from the inception of his program to penetrate viewers at the personal, relational level. In his "Philosophy" document, he

---

<sup>41</sup> Mara B. Adelman et al., "The Nature of Friendship and Its Development," in *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, 306.

wrote that, “When Mister Rogers looks into the television camera saying ‘You’re a very special person and I like you just the way you are,’ he makes an impression on the child viewer. The child’s environment has been extended to include a meaningful relationship with another adult.”<sup>42</sup>

The second dimension, “the breadth or variety of interaction increases,” and the third dimension, “the degree of interdependence or contingency increases,” harken to Greg’s memory of running home from school to experience Rogers’ “television visit.” Greg indicates a longing to visit with Rogers on a regular basis, illustrating the developing interdependence of the relationship and its meaningful impact on him. In regard to the second dimension, Adelman et al. note that as a friendship develops, the individuals come together to interact about a variety of concerns as well as intimate concerns. Greg’s recollection of the ways that *MRN*’s discussions on divorce helped him process that of his parents, speaks to both the second and third dimensions of friendship, as does his interest in sharing his teaching and artistic aspirations with Rogers. Indeed, both intimate and non-intimate concerns are discussed. Interestingly, Adelman et al. also highlight the finding that as participants become closer, the situational context of the bond becomes less significant. In letter writing, viewers indeed engage in an act that removes the regular relational context, that of watching Mister Rogers on television, from the dialogue. If “close relationships can serve as sources of social support in a greater range of settings than can ‘weaker,’ less developed relationships,”<sup>43</sup> it would seem that

---

<sup>42</sup> Rogers, “Philosophy,” Folder “Videodiscs,” Box EU88, Fred Rogers Archive.

<sup>43</sup> Adelman et al, 307.

the act of writing to Rogers carries with it a feeling, on behalf of the viewer, of relational closeness.<sup>44</sup>

In regards to the third dimension, “increasing interdependence and contingency,” Adelman et Al. write that “relationships develop to the degree that the participants become increasingly interdependent.” As such, what each participant garners becomes increasingly contingent upon the actions of the other. While we can deduce from Greg’s description of running home from school to “visit” with Rogers that he may have experienced the unfolding of this dimension of friendship in his *MRN* experience, we also know that the feeling is not reciprocated by Fred Rogers, at least not on any sort of individual or personal level. As I have noted, it is likely that Rogers learned and honed his interpersonal communication skills with young children during his time working at the Arsenal. Still, unlike the viewer, Rogers cannot form a similar parasocial friendship with his viewers because he is not privy to any secondary (or primary, for that matter) orality experiences of them. As such, the interdependence formed by viewers with Rogers is, in large part one-sided. The correspondence thus seeks to create a greater and a more appropriate balance in the “relationship.”

Adelman’s fifth dimension of relationship development is “increasing communication code specialization.” In this process, changes in the structure of

---

<sup>44</sup> For other television studies that use viewer mail as audience studies, see Claudia Collins, “Viewer Letters as Audience Research: The Case of Murphy Brown,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 41.1 (1997): 109-31; Lincoln Geraghty, “‘Help when times are hard’: Bereavement and Star Trek Fan Letters,” in *The Star Trek Universe: Franchising the Final Frontier*, ed. Douglas Brode and Shea T. Brode (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 175-84; Suruchi Sood and Everett M. Rogers, “Dimensions of Parasocial Interaction by Letter-Writers to a Popular Entertainment-Education Soap Opera in India,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44.3 (2000): 386-414.

communication develop between the two individuals in the relationship. As Willard Waller notes in his 1938 essay, "Courtship as a Social Process,"

As a result of conversations and experience, there emerges a common universe of discourse characterized by the feeling of something very special between two persons....They soon develop a special language, their own idioms, pet names, and jokes; as a pair, they have a history and a separate culture.<sup>45</sup>

This description provokes a variety of questions regarding whether and how this phenomenon might occur on *MRN*, or on any other television program for that matter. Indeed, *MRN* is characterized by a discursive cultural system created by Rogers. The viewer enters this world, and, over time engages in a process of decoding and learning the social and symbol systems of this world. He is, in fact, invited to participate in it as a kind of pseudo-member of the neighborhood. The letters indicate a desire on behalf of viewers to respond to the communication culture that they already feel a part of due to watching the show. So even though Rogers and his team are the sole creators of the communication code specialization, the regular viewer becomes a participant in this process and thus feels a sense of mutuality with the program host. For example, Greg closes his letter, "It is nice to know that I am special and you are too." Here, Greg demonstrates the communication code specialization that is constitutive of the bond he feels he has with Rogers. His use of this line, which Rogers repeats at the opening and closing of every episode, functions like a wink. It points to the special, dialogical communication code that the two of them share – the memory of the everyday greeting and goodbye that Rogers offers to Greg each time they "meet."

---

<sup>45</sup> Willard W. Waller, "Courtship as a Social Process," *On the Family, Education, and War: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 195.

The sixth dimension of relationship development identified by Adelman et al. is “decreasing cognitive uncertainty.” In his 1975 book, *Children In Front of the Small Screen*, Grant Noble argues that a process similar to parasocial interaction explains for viewer involvement in television programs. He emphasizes the experience of repeated exposure to television characters and environments and asserts that this repetition results in a sense of social predictability for the viewer. Noble, who strives to understand what fundamental needs television helps moderns meet, contends that “regularly appearing characters comprise something of a screen community.”<sup>46</sup> In television viewing, Noble argues, the viewer is able to “connect” and “interact” with others in ways that feel similar to social life in the pre-modern village community, where the individual interacted on “a single stage with the extended kin group.”<sup>47</sup> That is to say, the episodic viewing of a television program, as observed by Horton and Wohl, results in viewers sensing the program characters as members of their peer or community group. The television characters’ personalities and behaviors become predictable, and thus provide viewers with a sense of comfort that comes with the kind of “decreased cognitive uncertainty” that Adelman et al posit as a fundamental component of friendship development. “Uncertainty reduction involves creating the sense that one knows how to act toward the other, knows how the other is likely to act toward the self, and understands why the other acts the way he or she does,” write Adelman et al.<sup>48</sup> In modern societies, these kinds of predictable social relationships are fewer and farther between due to the fragmentation of life. In village life, “the context of extended kin grouping provides an identity harnessed

---

<sup>46</sup> Noble, 36-37.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>48</sup> Adelman et al., 308.



by repeated interaction with people well known to the individual.” Thus, as a result of same faces, e.g., Mister Rogers’ and the characters on the *Neighborhood*, appearing frequently “in” the home space, “the viewer feels he knows these people well enough, for example, to say ‘hello’ to them in the street.”<sup>49</sup> Certainly Greg’s letter illustrates a sense of familiarity with Rogers that involves a sense of cognitive certainty regarding who he is dealing with in correspondence.

Finally, Adelman et al. cite “increasing network contact and overlap” as a fundamental component in relationship development. At first glance, this characteristic may seem the least applicable to the parasocial relationship that emerges between Rogers and the viewer. “Our personal relationships,” write Adelman et al., “are also social objects existing within the broader context created by our surrounding social networks.”<sup>50</sup> The authors cite the perception on the part of the relationship participants that their friends and family support their relationship, communicate with members of the others’ networks, and are generally pleased with the other’s friends and family. How can such a process occur in a televisually-based parasocial relationship, one might ask? Yet Fred Rogers identified these complex social workings in relationship to television in his co-authored piece, written with Linda J. Philbrick, for the Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association Publication. In it, he notes the apparent parental-sanction that the child is likely to read into television programming simply due to the fact that it is the parents who have purchased the device and placed it in the living room of the home.<sup>51</sup> He writes about the nonverbal messages that adults send to children during television and movie viewing

---

<sup>49</sup> Noble, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Adelman et al., 308.

<sup>51</sup> Fred M. Rogers and Linda Philbrick, “Television and the Viewing Child,” *Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association Publication* 4 (October 1969): 1.

in which they often do not wince while viewing unethical behavior taking place on the screen. Such apparently unconcern may confuse children, he writes.

Indeed, Greg makes a point of telling Rogers how his family's viewing of the episodes on divorce helped members make sense of their experiences of that process. Here, Greg illustrates an example of the kind of incorporation that Rogers expected would occur with *MRN* viewers. In his "Philosophy" document he wrote the following regarding the show's second premise, "Television and television artists – participants in family relationships."

When Mister Rogers looks into the camera saying, 'You are a very special person. I like you just the way you are,' he makes an impression on the child viewer. The child's environment has been extended to include a meaningful relationship with another adult. In this way, Mister Rogers becomes a 'participant' in family relationships; the child first 'accepts' Mister Rogers into the family and then seeks support for the acceptance from the immediate family.

Greg's letter demonstrates this characteristic of network contact and overlap not only in the way that he extends his relationship with Rogers to touch the outer network of his immediate family, but also with his college peers, when he expresses a longing to share those habits and values that Rogers has taught him to embrace with those in his extended university environment who have turned to drug and alcohol use. Finally, he wishes to consult with Rogers on how to teach young children, seeking once again to connect Rogers to yet another important network of people in his life.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> See William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); David Barton and Nigel Hall, eds., *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin, 2000); Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorising Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/Biography* 12 (2010): 216-50.

### **On Becoming More Human – Dialoguing with a Young Woman**

On March 4, 1975, seventeen-year-old Julie Cruise of St. Louis, Missouri penned a letter to Mister Rogers noting her avid viewership of *MRN*. Although some of her peers find it “weird,” she writes, she “immensely” enjoys the program. She confesses that she did not “always feel this way” and notes that even recently when watching the program at her 6-year-old nephew’s insistence, she could “barely endure each half hour.”<sup>53</sup> Julie found the “Neighborhood of Make-Believe” segment “particularly annoying” but viewed because she “generally had nothing better to do.” Then, in a reflective turn, she writes that while holistically she did not enjoy the show itself, “there was something in the attitude of the performers” and especially Rogers’ approach that did appeal to her.

You actually seemed to care about the viewer. There was a type of communication there that I had never experienced before – particularly from the television. I was impressed.

Julie found herself tuning into *MRN* after her nephew departed for the summer when she sat down to view another PBS program, “Villa Alegre,” which helped her with her Spanish skills. She tuned in when Rogers was saying his goodbyes to his television audience, singing “...and you’ll have things you’ll want to talk about, I will too.” “That lyric meant a lot to me because I believed that unless I had something revolutionary or brilliant to talk about, it wasn’t worth speaking,” she wrote. “You seemed to say that it is all right to tell people what I think, brilliant or insignificant.” Thus, she gradually found herself tuning in earlier in order to watch the full program in its entirety.

Julie continues, reaching into her interior spaces when writing about Rogers’ messaging regarding feelings. She writes how she hears Rogers tell his viewers “again

---

<sup>53</sup> Julie Cruise to Rogers, 4 Mar., 1975, Folder 3, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

and again” the importance of expressing their feelings. “Whether it be anger, happiness, fear, or worry,” she writes, “they must come out.”<sup>54</sup> Julie states that she knows from experience that his message is “true” because she grew up in an environment wherein feelings were viewed as “bad things” and a “sign of weakness.”<sup>55</sup> After holding onto this perception for years, she observes that she has become “not a person who doesn’t express feelings, but one who doesn’t have them.” “I have become dehumanized to an amazing degree,”<sup>56</sup> she writes, noting how beneficial Rogers’ program has been to her of late as she has been experiencing good feelings from watching his show. “I have hope and almost believe now that I can change and become a caring person,” she writes.<sup>57</sup> She closes by thanking Rogers for caring about people and for sharing himself and his ideas with people like her, who need support. “God bless you,” she writes, and ends with a post-script that states “I can even enjoy the Neighborhood of Make-Believe now.”<sup>58</sup>

Julie’s reconnection with and reassessment of the *MRN* establishes another theme often found in letters from YA’s – the need for healing and its discovery through a return to viewing Rogers and the *Neighborhood*. Julie, at first, finds *MRN* silly and “annoying” when she revisits it at the age of seventeen with her 6-year-old nephew. Later, in the absence of her nephew,<sup>59</sup> she finds herself turning toward the program when she realizes Rogers’ deeper messages of care below the surface of the show’s everyday activities. Such expressions of care, along with Rogers’ encouragement feeling expression, touches

---

<sup>54</sup> Cruise to Fred Rogers, 4 Mar., 1975.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> The absence of Julie’s nephew is notable here in regards to the way in which Julie’s second round of viewing takes place in a setting where only she and Rogers are the only two (read: dialogic) present in her space.

Julie on a deeper level, such that she has a self-realizing moment wherein she recognizes how years of stifling feelings have transformed her into a non-feeling, “dehumanized” person. Seeing herself in a new light, as a result of her interior dialoging with Rogers, she expresses how she has been healed by Rogers, whose expressions of care for her have inspired the rise of positive emotions within. The internalization, thus, of Rogers’ caring expressions, have given Julie hope and empowered her to believe that she can now change from being a non-feeling person to a caring one.

In his chapter on dialogue and freedom, Paulo Freire writes:

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak had been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression.<sup>60</sup>

It would appear that Julie, in her letter, has come to some self-realization about the ways she has self-censored in both thought and speech. Finding such self-censorship oppressive and stifling, she remarkably employs the same term Freire uses to describe the oppression of indigenous communities in Latin America—*dehumanizing*. Julie thus credits her continual viewing of Rogers’ program, and more specifically the care she feels he emotes to her throughout the show, with placing her on the path to a liberating self-realization process regarding the expression of her feelings and thoughts. From the perspective of Freire, Julie’s letter, in which she proclaims her transformation and newfound voice, is a self-affirming exclamation of her rediscovered humanity through her perceived relationship with Rogers and *MRN*. It could also be considered her formal

---

<sup>60</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69.

dialogical response to a conversation she has been having with Rogers internally since she began re-watching his program. Freire writes, “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.”<sup>61</sup> In characterizing her inability to vocalize her feelings as *dehumanizing* and her awakening to feeling and vocal expression as *good*, Julie, a young American, validates and universalizes Friere’s argument regarding the “existential necessity” of dialogue.

Fred Rogers has stated that he considered his television program his ministry. He spent several years studying for his Master’s degree in Divinity at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary while producing his first children’s television program, *The Children’s Corner* (1953-61). His understanding of the human person was significantly influenced by his religious background in the Presbyterian faith and his advanced study in seminary. It thus behooves those who study his program and its reception to make the appropriate connection between his “ministerial” communication messaging and his faith in a way that fosters a clearer understanding of his various points of departure.

Rogers’ decision to omit explicit religious language and symbols from his program is important to highlight as it speaks not only to the political and cultural rhetorical constraints of the postwar period, but also to the project of historicizing Rogers in a properly holistic way. Although he refrained from contextualizing his program in overt Christian rhetoric in order to meet the non-religious requirements of PBS, Rogers’ embeddedness in the Christian tradition matters because the presuppositions we bring to

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

our interactions with others are critically important. For one, when left inarticulate, others will import their own assumptions about the framework one is bringing to the encounter.

One example of this in regards to Rogers, involves a relatively recent discussion (2013) on the Fox News channel's *Fox and Friends*, in which on-air commentators decry the implications of Rogers' primary message to children characterized by the phrase, "You are Special." In the segment, Fox News on-airers criticize Rogers' message for creating a generation of young adults who carry with them a problematic "sense of entitlement." The importance of this phrase to the piece was emphasized visually by its placement on the screen, below an image of Rogers. Lead on-air personality, Steve Doocy begins the segment by noting that experts are currently arguing that millennials who grew up watching *MRN* were told by Rogers that they were special just for being themselves (read: for doing nothing). Doocy then notes that Rogers did not say, "If you want to be special, you're going to have to work hard."<sup>62</sup>

The *Fox and Friends* critique is interesting on a number of levels that speak to the misreading of Rogers' guiding principles and aims. For one, the hosts, speaking on a network known for its ideologically conservative perspective, read messages of liberal child-rearing practices characterized by indulgence and pandering into Rogers' media text. Their rhetorical work has the effect of distancing Rogers pedagogy from values of hard work and discipline, which are reinscribed as values exclusive to conservative ideology and colored with an air of traditional American masculinity characterized by toughness, emotional restraint, and grit. On-air Elisabeth Hasselbeck flippantly calls

---

<sup>62</sup> "Fox News Spends 6 Minutes Describing Why Mr. Rogers Was An Evil, Evil Man," Upworthy.com, accessed 21 Sep., 2015, <http://www.upworthy.com/fox-news-spends-6-minutes-describing-why-mr-rogers-was-an-evil-evil-man-5>.

Rogers “an evil, evil man” at the beginning of the segment, supposedly for fostering this “sense of entitlement” in his viewers. If these ideologically conservative commentators knew that Rogers’ message to children was partly rooted in a Christian theology based on Christ’s love for each and every human being regardless of sect, class, race, and individual deeds, perhaps they might have considered celebrating, rather than condemning him.

Regardless of the value judgments at work in this example, the more relevant takeaway for our discussion is that scholars and citizens alike must be mindful and thorough when researching and analyzing empirical texts and agents in order to understand them in their proper context and in all their complexity. Because Rogers strived to meet the rhetorical constraints of public broadcasting by operating within a strict secular discourse, he left room for others to derive their own assumptions and narratives about the framework he was bringing to his television encounter. This example points to the broader problem of secularism, pluralism, and the ways that it has developed in the United States. From its early manifestations in the first half of the twentieth century, calls for pluralism have almost uniformly resulted in the privatization of religion and religious expression rather than the public, plural articulation of a variety of religions.

In his article, “A Holistic Values Education: Emotionality, Rationality and Meaning,” Belgian philosopher Roger Burggraeve discusses the importance of a “relational and emotionally involved God”<sup>63</sup> in the Christian tradition, noting that Jesus, who always speaks of God in a well-defined way by linking Him to the idea of kingship

---

<sup>63</sup> Burggraeve 1.



and lordship, announces not a high and mighty image of God, but rather “a God who comes near and who precisely discards His ‘tremendous majesty’ and binds Himself with ‘the poor, the weeping, the hungry, the crushed’ (cf. the Beatitudes).”<sup>64</sup> In this conception of the divine, God is not, as he had been conceived of prior to this point, described in terms of an alienating theoretical or metaphysical category, Burggraeve writes. Rather,

God is always Someone, a You, a ‘person,’ which is understood as merciful and loving. He is touched by what concerns and happens to people. This implies that God is also sensitive and moved, and this in His philosophical, or necessary principle of explanation, but a living Someone who in His ‘heart’, unto ‘the marrow of His bones’, is moved by what people go through in their history.

This involvement of God, writes Burggraeve, is understood “*emotionally*.” God thus “suffers and feels pain in His belly by the suffering of people. He is affected by what happens.”<sup>65</sup> He is thus, as Burggraeve writes, a dynamic, not a static, God. Such understanding of the Christian God here is important to our understanding of Rogers’ project and the way that he appears to succeed in reaching viewers on a personal and healing basis, like he did here with Julie Cruise.

Burggraeve’s discussion is rooted in an understanding of “emotionality”<sup>66</sup> as an experience of belongingness in security and participation, whereby both the confrontation with what is ‘reasonable’ and ethically responsible, as well as the integration in a sustaining perspective of meaning is embedded and made possible.”<sup>67</sup> Employing the terms of Winnicott, Burggraeve proclaims that emotional embedment creates the

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> It is important to note here that Burggraeve’s definition of “emotionality” excludes many emotional phenomena due to its basis in an ethical appeal. Because it is an experience of belongingness, it inherently excludes violence, bigotry, fear, shame, and other negative or dark primary emotions.

<sup>67</sup> Burggraeve, 1.

necessary ‘potential space,’ for education by creating a ‘milieu’ of “safety, ambience, security, conviviality, and familiarity” in order to provide young people with a sense of home in themselves and in relation to one another.<sup>68</sup>

Rogers begins his response letter to Julie by creating this kind of safe, affirming, convivial ‘milieu’ described by Winnicott in words of appreciation, praise, and welcome. “Your beautiful, sensitive letter was a real gift,” he writes. “I was deeply moved by your description of how your own discovery of your feelings developed as a part of your relationship with our program.”<sup>69</sup> Such a heightened understanding of the relational role Rogers’ program plays for viewers is a consistent theme in his early writings on television. In his Yale speech, Rogers notes that because television has become a fixture in every American home, the attitudes expressed on it naturally “become involved in family communications” and as such, viewing it “must be considered as having its roots at the core of human development.”<sup>70</sup> He understands the effective power of the television medium to reach people directly and fashions his program in an intentional dialogical relationship with the viewer and within the domestic milieu of the family. By employing Burggraeve’s “emotional embedment,” he seems to create Winnicott’s “necessary potential space” for education and Julie’s letter demonstrates the success of Rogers’ efforts in the detailing of her transformational healing process.

In his reply to Julie, Rogers writes how he imagines that Julie’s growing ability to communicate her feelings to others and “feel their response” must give her great pleasure.<sup>71</sup> He then notes that he feels pleasure in hearing that she has grown in this way,

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>69</sup> Rogers to Julie Cruise, 2 Apr., 1975, Folder 3, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

<sup>70</sup> Rogers, “Yale”.

<sup>71</sup> Rogers to Julie Cruise, 2 Apr., 1975.

sharing in her experience. Recognizing the depth of her interior process in such growth, he states that the insight she must have had into herself in order to express her transformation “could only have evolved after an intense inner struggle.” “Growing isn’t easy at any age,” he confesses. He tells her how he deeply admires the openness and honesty with which she shared her feelings about herself and the *Neighborhood* with him. Careful to accredit her with the success of her and her own self-realization and transformation, he writes,

I am very aware that you were already striving to become more open to your feelings, and that the program was only a part of your own desire to reach out to others. But I’m so glad to feel that I was a part of it. You are a special person. I like the way you’re growing and I like you, exactly as you are.

Here, Rogers not only places credit with Julie, but he minimizes his program’s exigent role in Julie’s transformation. While Julie writes to praise Rogers for the positive personal effects the *Neighborhood* has had on her, Rogers humbly transfers credit back to Julie, identifying within her an already present effort to liberate her feelings and their expression while placing his program’s agency in the process as a secondary force.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argues that a liberating education must consist in acts of cognition rather than in the transference of information. He critiques the standard model of western education in which information is “deposited” into the minds of students by teachers and names this process the “banking model of education.” Such an approach to educating is not in fact educational at all, he writes. On the contrary, it is oppressive in its exercising of domination and control by obviating thinking and operating at the level of narrative.<sup>72</sup> Such praxis results in the alienation of both teacher

---

<sup>72</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 52.

and student. “Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men,” he writes.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, “liberation is a praxis,” he continues, “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” For Freire, the ideal method to employ in this liberation praxis is what he calls “dialogical relations.”<sup>74</sup>

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught, also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.

There are several aspects of Freire’s “dialogical relations” method to be found in the correspondence between Rogers and Julie. First, Julie writes that she perceives in Rogers’ television presentation an expression of care. Such communication of affect, which she perceives as sincere, creates an opening of reception within Julie and compels her to continue to view the program. Next, she begins to internalize one of Rogers’ daily messages, expressed in song, the lyrics that highlight the dialogical relationship Rogers’ has or wants to have with his viewer – “and you’ll have things you want to talk about, I will too.” Such internalization allows Rogers’ lyric to act as a tool for analysis of her own inner dynamics by prompting her to listen.

Rogers’ rhetoric throughout the show, because it is grounded in dialogical practice, calls for the viewers to listen not only to his speech, but to the inner responses to his prompts they are experiencing. This repeated invitation begins to cognitively penetrate, on a gradual level, Julie’s understanding of self and environment. She realizes

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

that Rogers' encouraging gestures for his viewers to speak and share with him are in stark contrast to the messages she has received and internalized for most of her life. Prompted by this dialogical exchange, combined with Rogers' affectionate affirmation of his care for the viewer, Julie sets out on a journey of self-realization and healing that is directly tied to speech communication, thus fulfilling Freire's aspiration for a liberating education that stresses engagement in productive listening and speech. Such productive listening leads to a cognitive moment cherished by Freire as the goal of his pedagogy. Then, in reading Julie's long letter, Rogers, too, learns from his viewer. In the dialogical process, Freire writes, teacher and student "become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." Here, the authority figure of teacher (i.e. Rogers) is "on the side of freedom, not against it," as Freire puts it. "Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught." Rather, "people teach each other, mediated by the world."<sup>75</sup> While Freire envisions a space of exchange where the teacher and students are materially present, Rogers offers his television program as the ground (world) where a communication exchange takes place.

Finally, I think it important to note that Rogers embraced an understanding of Jesus as advocate, a metaphor articulated to him by his seminal professor and mentor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Dr. William Orr. In a hand-written draft of his aforementioned "Invisible to the Eye" speech, delivered at the 1994 commencement ceremony at his graduate program alma mater Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Rogers celebrates Orr's theological understandings and pedagogy. He describes a Sunday

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 61.

morning at church, singing “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” and wondering about the meaning of one particular verse.

The Prince of Darkness grim  
We tremble not for him  
His rage we can endure  
For lo! His doom is sure  
Our little word shall fell him.

In response to his curiosity, Rogers asked Dr. Orr about the meaning of the phrase, ‘our little word shall fell him.’ “What is that one little word that will fell the Prince of Darkness,” he asks Orr.<sup>76</sup> After a few seconds of thought, Orr replies, “Forgive...Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”<sup>77</sup> He continues, “You know Fred, there’s only one thing that evil cannot stand and that is forgiveness.”<sup>78</sup> In his speech, Rogers notes that this was “the kind of lesson that you remember forever.”<sup>79</sup> This line and the content that follows is crossed-out of the speech draft. Yet its content is most pertinent to our discussion here. Rogers continues by detailing the fundamental differences between the Prince of Darkness and Jesus according to his conversations with Orr. “Evil,” Orr told Rogers, “is the ACCUSER.”<sup>80</sup>

Evil wants you to feel as negative as possible about who you are so you will look at your neighbor through your negative eyes and see your neighbor in a negative way. That’s why evil would use any means available constantly to secure you so you would think of creation as BAD.<sup>81</sup>

In contrast, Orr describes Jesus as “our ADVOCATE.”<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Fred Rogers, “Invisible to the Eye,” draft of speech to Presbyterian Theological Seminary, April 26, 1994, Folder “1997,” Box EU74, Fred Rogers Archives.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

[Jesus] wants us to feel as positive as possible about who we are so we will look at our neighbor through our positive eyes and see our neighbor in a positive way. That's why Jesus would use any means available constantly to be our advocate so we would think of creation as GOOD.<sup>83</sup>

It is this role of advocate that Rogers seeks to embrace and perform. On *MRN*, he encourages his viewers to love themselves, to embrace their curiosity and wonder, and to understand that they have the power to manage their feelings in positive and non-harmful ways. In his response letter to Julie, he advocates for her self-discovery and praises her healthy transformation. An advocate, he tells her that he is proud of her and the ways she has grown. Further, Julie describes her experience of Rogers' mutual affirmation as freeing and liberating. Growing up, she has been told that speaking, expressing herself, her emotions, was something bad and unwanted by others. She embraced this and found herself "becoming dehumanized."<sup>84</sup> Rogers' advocacy breaks her of this negative hold on her sense of self. She feels him advocating on her behalf, encouraging her to speak her thoughts and love herself exactly as she is. The message, heard over and over again by Cruise, results in a radical transformation toward a positive self-image and speaking confidence.

### **Sharing Existence – Dialoging with a Grieving Mother**

In the autumn of 1974, mother of three, Sally Rector, wrote to "Mister Rogers" to inform him of the death of her five-year-old son, Tommy. Rector begins her letter stating that she is, at the moment, "listening to your wonderful voice," which reminds her of the

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

joy Rogers brought to her son.<sup>85</sup> Next, she informs him that the boy died at 6:45 AM on August 19, just a few days after Tommy received a letter and pictures from Rogers. “He was very happy about your caring – as were we all,” she writes. Noting her impression of children’s general innocence and acceptance, she tells Rogers that her other two children—twins, Donny and Marty—took the news “very well.” She was relieved by their reaction to Tommy’s death but writes that “after having seen my son die, I am full of bitterness, that hopefully, will fade with time.” She wishes that Rogers could explain to the twins, Donny and Marty, why she gets so angry about “Tommy being gone,” as she feels that she does not understand her own feelings enough to explain them to the boys. Sally then wishes to share a “Thank You” letter Tommy wrote to him but states that she simply cannot part with it and will thus attempt to emulate it in his own “five-year-old penmanship.” In her emulation, she writes, “Dear Mr. Rogers thank you for the record I like it very much. I.V. doesnt hurt just a little bit when they put it in. Love Tommy.” “I miss his beauty and wish so many people could have met him.” Sally concludes by expressing hope that Rogers will continue to “generate all that love and care,” which she saw in Tommy and in others.

Sally’s letter, together with her emulation of her son’s posthumous letter, constitutes the point of loving encounter that Freire finds indispensable in the true dialogic relationship. The dialogic encounter, for Freire, is not a place wherein two people speak to one another but rather a place where two people share a moment of affective movement. Freire contends that “dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people....Love is at the same time the foundation of

---

<sup>85</sup> Sally Rector to Rogers, 23 Oct., 1974, Folder 4, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.



dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination....Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to others....And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical.”<sup>86</sup> Further, he writes that dialogue cannot exist without humility, a disposition he deems the opposite of both arrogance and self-sufficiency. “Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter.”<sup>87</sup>

Sally’s letter reveals the dialogical nature of her relationship to Rogers in the rhetorical spirit of love, humility, and faith with which she writes. She presents herself, in all her humility, grief and confusion, to Rogers in her most vulnerable state. Such an act requires not only courage, but a deep faith that Rogers will correspond to her gesture with love and understanding. Along with love and humility, Freire identifies faith in humanity as the third and final component of dialogue. Such faith can be found in Rectors’ letter, struggling in conjunction with the forces of anger, grief, and despair that she is experiencing and which cloud her love for her two other children. For example, after she hand-copies Tommy’s letter and expresses her admiration for his lost beauty, Sally communicates her faith in Rogers to “continue to generate all that love and care” that she saw in Tommy and others. “Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the ‘dialogical man’ believes in others even before he meets them face to face,” writes Freire.<sup>88</sup> Sally’s letter thus attests to the fact that *MRN* functions as a space for dialogical interaction and not simply as theatrical entertainment. *MRN* occurs in both virtual and

---

<sup>86</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 70.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

real time, for in its movement of the emotions and invitation to interact with ‘Mr. Rogers’ as a “real” person, the distance between the viewer and Rogers’ “character” is breached in ways unique to the television programing of his time.

In his response letter, Rogers opens by telling Sally how he wishes that she “could have been here” when he and his colleagues “shared [her] grief in losing Tommy.”<sup>89</sup> Notice what Rogers does here in the opening of his letter. He describes a group of real people, him included, who gathered together to share the news of Tommy’s death. The rhetoric of the letter’s opening creates an immediate communication circle that includes, in addition to both he and Sally, a group of friendly others—an empathic community that shares in Sally’s grief. With this statement, Rogers creates a larger “we” between he and Sally while still maintaining the intimate dialogical nature of their personal communiqué. The image that comes to mind when reading this sentence is that of Rogers, standing amongst his staff, reading Sally’s letter, while his colleagues express sadness and empathy for Sally and her family’s loss. The scene evokes a eulogy and funeral, wherein people connected in love or friendship to a recently deceased person gather together to say goodbyes and honor that person’s life. This social ritual is constituted by both the gathering of bodies and by a public speech. In the shared process of listening to a recollection of the deceased and the lives he left behind, a reality of solidarity is created. In effect, Rogers provided for Sally a kind of funeral for Tommy attended by the creators of his favorite television program. Such an event also yields a sense of “suffering with,” which is central to Christian theology and to the role of the minister. Just as Jesus Christ places himself within the suffering of those who seek his healing ministry, the priest or

---

<sup>89</sup> Rogers to Rector, Nov., 1974.

minister takes on this role as a servant of Christ. In *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen, a public theologian, intellectual, and friend of Rogers, contends that the minister must be willing to go beyond his strictly professional role and become open as a fellow human being with similar wounds and suffering. The minister must first recognize the sufferings of his own time and then make that recognition the starting point of his service.<sup>90</sup>

As in other cases, Rogers affirms not just the positive feelings of his interlocutor, but also “negative” feelings such as anger and grief. “Of course you have bitter and angry feelings about your loss,” he writes, “How strange it would be if you didn’t.” Rogers attempts to reframe Sally’s feelings when he tells her that “otherwise, you would have never done us the honor of sharing yourself with us....so much of Tommy’s beauty must have come from you.” Here, he reminds Sally of the fullness of her own humanity. He does not negate or lay negative judgment on the difficult feelings she is experiencing but rather acknowledges them as valid and then moves on to focus on her appreciation of Tommy’s beauty. According to Pierre Furter, “authentic humanism consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation and as a project.”<sup>91</sup> Then, assigning value to the observation Tommy made in his letter—“Tommy’s note about the IV is very helpful to me”—Rogers informs Sally that he will use Tommy’s statement in a series of shoots for hospitalized children currently in production. “I am constantly learning from children,” he writes.

This last line is notable in regards to Freire’s understanding of dialogic because it demonstrates the importance of the dialogical relations method of education, in which both teacher and student learn from each other. “Education must begin with the solution

---

<sup>90</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image, 1979), back cover.

<sup>91</sup> Pierre Furter, quoted in Freire, 74.

of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.”<sup>92</sup> Here, Rogers’ humility, again a fundamental requirement for dialogue according to Freire, resounds as he reverses the normative and assumed knowledge transfer *from* teacher *to* student and places the capacity to illuminate the world with the student/child. This move further serves to place both Sally and her son, Tommy, on equal footing with Rogers in their shared humanity. Each have authentic knowledge and experience to share with the other and that dialogical exchange results in true learning for all participants.

Finally, Rogers shifts his attention to Sally’s remaining children, Donny and Marty. He tells Sally how fortunate they are to have her as a mother. He also, albeit without going into much detail, informs her that her impression of their reception of Tommy’s death may not be as painless as she perceives. “Their fantasies about Tommy’s death could be very frightening,” he writes, sharing with her his knowledge of child psychology in a straight-forward manner. He concludes by telling Sally that his thoughts and prayers, and those of his production team, are with her. “Again, my thanks for allowing us to be part of your wonderful family. Most sincerely, Fred Rogers.” The final sentences conclude in the same, familial way that he opened the letter, emphasizing his (and his staff’s) kinship with Sally and her family. However, it is not simply a relationship that Rogers creates with this statement. It is an imaginary formation of a familial group, created through the written word. Again, expressing humility, he thanks her for *allowing* him (and his staff) to be a “part” of her *family*. Here, Rogers again inverts the assumed relations between he and Sally by expressing his gratitude to her for

---

<sup>92</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53.

accepting *him* into her intimate, familial world. He also disembowels the consumer paradigm of other television programs in which the viewer is understood as an anonymous consumer of both programming and the products advertised on it.

### **Critiquing Parents**

The letters we have examined thus far are demonstrative of the dynamic, deeply intimate, parasocial relationships that viewers developed with Rogers. However, not all letters to Rogers carry with them that aura of penetrating connectedness and emotional attachment. I would like to shift now to letters written by parents and other elders that seek to dialogue with Rogers within a discourse of observation and critique. These letters offer us a perspective on the ways in which parents observed their children communicating with Rogers. Like Rector, their concerns are focused on the ways that Rogers' program has affected their child and family life. Although they do not seek to connect with Rogers on a deeper, emotional level, their letters illustrate the broader interpersonal dialogical system at work between Rogers and viewers – one in which an 'I-Thou' orientation is embraced and employed (in contrast with the 'I-It' attitude where the partner is treated more like an object than an individual).

Unlike the previous letter writers who communicate through hand-written penmanship, Alan Headbloom of Ann Arbor, Michigan writes to Rogers on a typewriter. He admits that he has only been aware of Rogers for the past six months, but proclaims that it has been a pleasure to have *MRN* "in [his] house."<sup>93</sup> Alan notes that he and his wife have steered their children away from television at large either because of the "poor

---

<sup>93</sup> Alan G. Headbloom to Rogers, 1983, EUFan5, Fred Rogers Archive.

quality of the programs” or because of the “insipid or harmful values taught by much of the children’s programming.” He and his wife recently “pulled the plug” on *Sesame Street* after determining that the show had “little value for [their] child.” Then Alan moves to commend Rogers for his program. “Let me mention why you are such a regular part of our week,” he writes. First, Alan notes Rogers “easy manner of delivery,” complimenting him on the ways he speaks to the viewer “cheerfully but deliberately.” Alan expresses gratitude for the *Neighborhood’s* absence of a “whiz-bang pace, full of added graphics or sound effects.” He says that this allows children to clearly follow what Rogers says and notes his appreciation for Rogers’ effective communication strategy of introducing new topics and ideas in a simple manner and then reinforcing them over an entire program or week. Alan notes that this provides the child viewer with “plenty of time to digest and assimilate.” He likes how Rogers “speaks to the children just as in real conversation,” underlining the word “to,” ostensibly to emphasize the interpersonal nature of Rogers’ communication method. “Unlike other programs, our daughter [Katy] responds to you singing along, nodding her head, or answering your questions,” Alan continues. “You involve her,” he concludes.

Alan’s analysis of the reasons why he appreciates *MRN* point towards recognition of the kind of dialogic communication style that Rogers employs. He emphasizes the ways that Rogers clears a space for meaningful communication between himself and the viewer by speaking in a slow, conversational manner that allows for the viewer “plenty of time to digest and assimilate.” Alan feels the intentional creation of this critical “between” space in stark contrast with the aesthetic content of the usual children’s programming, which he describes as fast-paced and noisy. According to Alan, there is

room in Rogers' delivery for the viewer to follow along in a realistic way due to the lack of distractions in the presentation. In contrast, other programs' "whiz bang pace," combined with busy graphics and sounds, impedes real communication in the ways that it confuses, divides, and disturbs the senses.

Buber argued that dialogic communication could only emerge from a situation in which persons treated each other as "Thou." If this stance toward the other in conversation is not established by either party, he suggested, the exchange would result in monologic communication in which an 'I-It' dynamic ensued. In the 'I-It,' monologic communication situation, persons view the other as object rather than as an individual. According to Richard Johansson, monologic communication is characterized by a tendency to "command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit."<sup>94</sup> Alan notes the presence of these characteristics of monologic communication in describing the commercial children's television programs. Notably, Bill Isler, a close friend and business associate of Fred Rogers who is currently the CEO of The Fred Rogers Company, admitted that when he suggested to Rogers the possibility of allowing a toy company to produce and market models of *MRN*'s "Trolley," Rogers refused. According to Isler, he rejected any kind of commercialization of *MRN* because 'he never wanted parents to feel that he was exploiting them.'<sup>95</sup> Unlike dialogic communication, which "upholds and respects the freedom of [communication partners] in the transaction,"

---

<sup>94</sup> Richard Johanssen, "The Emerging Concept of Communication as Dialogue," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 57 (1971): 377.

<sup>95</sup> Bill Isler at University of Pittsburgh Panel Event, "The Making of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, featuring Bill Isler, Hedda Sharapan, David Newell, Joanne Rogers, and Carl Kurlander, September 16, 2011. See "Pitt to Host Panel on the Making of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood Sept. 16," University of Pittsburgh News Services, <http://www.news.pitt.edu/news/pitt-host-panel-making-mister-rogers-neighborhood-sept-16>.

monologue seeks to control the other. When Alan takes note of how his daughter responds to Rogers by singing along to his songs, nodding her head, or answering the questions he poses to her throughout the program, he further illustrates the dialogical process at work. His daughter, Katy, must sense the ways Rogers' values her, not as an object to be used, but as a unique person worthy of acknowledgment and respect.

Alan next praises Rogers for the discursive content of his programs, writing that *MRN* "topics are relevant to developing youngsters" and that Rogers talks about concerns and problems that are "very real to them." Alan notes that he and his wife "identified" with Rogers' program on witches, in which Rogers invites onto the program Margaret Hamilton, the actor who played the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. During the program, Rogers talks with Margaret Hamilton, who appears in everyday clothing, on playing the role of the Wicked Witch.<sup>96</sup> While some themes carry through the entire

---

<sup>96</sup> On this program, Rogers and Hamilton sit down in Rogers' home to discuss Rogers questions on Hamilton's role as the Wicked Witch. He prompts discussions on Halloween and costume play, in which Hamilton talks about how she liked to dress up as a witch for the holiday when she was a young girl. She talks about how the Wicked Witch character often comes across as mean but also notes that she loves what she does and often gets frustrated that she does not have more successful outcomes with her plans. "As far as we know, that witch just never got what she wanted," Hamilton tells Rogers. "And mainly, she wanted those ruby slippers because she had lots of power and she wanted more power." Here, Hamilton offers a portrait of a complex, emotional character in her description of the Wicked Witch that offers a fuller picture of her humanity and helps children identify with the feelings of frustration that result in her "mean" behavior. Actually, "you have to think about her point of view," she tells Rogers. "It wasn't as happy a time as she wanted it to be because she just never got what she wanted." Hamilton also discusses how making the film was very hard work and not all "fun" as some people might imagine. She describes how she had to be fed her lunch during shooting in very small, chewable bites because if she touched the food, her green makeup would come off. This revelation also served to emphasize to the child viewer that the green skin Hamilton had in the film was just another part of her costume. Hamilton further expresses that she sometime becomes sad when she hears that some children get quite frightened of her portrayal of the witch, noting that people who worked on the film did not realize how scary the witch might seem to be in the eyes of small children. "But when you understand that it's just pretend," she says, "you realize that everyone can do it." To close the visit, Rogers asks Hamilton to try on the costume she wore in the film. They proceed to take out various pieces of clothing from her suitcase. As she tightens the waistband of her long, black skirt, Rogers says "It's helping me just to see you get into these things. To know that you're a real lady who got dressed up to play this part." He helps her zip up the back of her top noting that the zipper is just like the one that is on the front of all of his sweaters. As Hamilton places the witch hat on her head, a tall and pointy cloth cone with a circular brim, she smiles into the camera and says, "there!" while Johnny Costa plays playfully on the Celeste. Finally, Rogers asks her to speak in her Wicked Witch voice, to which she responds in kind. "Well, she talks like this; it's very nice to see you," and cackles as the camera zooms in



program, Alan writes, “others are presented as underlying values,” like courtesy, helpfulness, self-pride, and belonging. “I feel that these concepts are so important to our children,” he concludes. Throughout his letter, Alan maintains a discourse that contrasts the lessons and messages in Rogers’ program, which he appreciates, with those of commercial television, which he clearly disfavours.

In the final paragraph, Alan tells Rogers that, “most importantly,” he and his wife like Rogers because they feel that he is a “very sincere person.” He lauds Rogers for speaking openly about feelings and for speaking in the “kind and understanding manner of a friend.” This observation about Rogers’ ability to speak openly about his feelings points towards the intrapersonal dialogical dynamic that is part and parcel of Rogers own interpersonal style. T.D. Thomlison discusses the central characteristics of intrapersonal communication in an effort to highlight the self-dimensions of dialogue that are brought to a relationship by the individuals involved. One of these primary characteristics is self-awareness, a quality that involves a conscience recognition of one’s feelings and an ability to “live them” in the present.<sup>97</sup> Feelings, Thomlison notes, are “a real part of our experiencing and sensing the world.”<sup>98</sup> As such, they provide us with important information about how we are internally reacting to our surroundings. Recall how Rogers decided not to follow his elders’ advice to ignore the feelings he felt after being bullied because doing so suppressed the authenticity of his experience. Instead, he felt the emotions and expressed them through the creative and dialogical (both intrapersonal and interpersonal) act of piano playing. Rogers gave the feelings voice. This act of self-

---

close to her face. Then she giggles in her own voice while Rogers laughs and says that it would be fun to talk like that. They both then confirm for the viewer that anyone can indeed talk this way if they want.

<sup>97</sup> T. D. Thomlison, *Toward Interpersonal Dialogue* (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1983), 86.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

expression, Thomlison writes, follows the act of becoming self-aware in the intrapersonal dialogical dynamic. “Our self-disclosure is characterized by clearness, comprehensiveness, sensitiveness, and sincerity. There is expression of what we *are* at that moment,” he writes.<sup>99</sup> This openness to one’s internal state, which Rogers practices daily on his program, includes a congruence between one’s feelings and expressions that is authentic and comforting to the other, e.g., Alan.

Weeks before writing the letter, Alan notes, his daughter Katy asked him and his wife if they could invite Rogers over for supper, indicating, according to Alan, how close she feels to Rogers. “I sense you really love your t.v. children and have a great deal of concern for their healthy personal and social development.” Alan notes that Rogers has served as a positive example to him, providing him with “good insights into parenting and relating to children.” He proclaims that in some households it may be the case that Rogers is the sole positive adult role model that children view, a thought that he finds both a gratifying and terrifying at the same time. “I am sure you are aware of the job you are doing,” he concludes.

To close, Alan offers his explicit thanks to Rogers. Interestingly, he reveals how he feels that Rogers ‘visits his home’ via the television program.

Thank you for coming into our house and working the magic you do. You are truly a fine person. May you have many more years to touch children in your special way.

Clearly, Alan is meaningfully affected by Rogers at the interpersonal level. While the bulk of his letter details his empirical observations, they are infused with feelings of sincere appreciation for the good things Rogers has bestowed on his child and family at

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

large. Alan's letter, like the others we have examined thus far, illustrates the strong mirroring effect that occurs between viewer letter writers and Rogers. These writers often praise Rogers for the very characteristics that they display toward him in their own discursive expressions. This mirroring effect illustrates the mutuality at play in Rogers' communication with viewers. Thomlison writes that the twentieth century scholars credited for first addressing in depth the human need for effective interpersonal relationships in modern life and its relationship to human communication (e.g. Buber, Ashley Montagu, Carl Rogers, Eric Fromm, and Jean-Paul Sartre) all make references to "an open, sincere form of interpersonal communication called dialogue."<sup>100</sup> Thomlison characterizes dialogue as a one-to-one interaction in which participants do not feel any need to employ a façade or a need to conceal oneself. This kind of communication is opposed to coercion and exploitation and other dishonest forms of human interaction that are employed to manipulate persons. In contrast, "dialogue includes trust, openness, spontaneity, caring, sensitivity, sincerity, and empathy," Thomlison writes. Alan senses that this ethic of honesty and care undergirds *MRN* and, as a result of feeling this ethos at work in his own reception of the show, he answers Rogers' call for dialogue through letter writing. In an act of reciprocity that mirrors the sincerity and mutuality that he recognizes in Rogers, Alan writes this letter of appreciation.

In early December of 1981, Kathy Glaser typed a letter of thanks to Fred Rogers in the spirit of the "holiday season." She writes on behalf of her and her four-year-old daughter, Amira, because they hold Rogers in "special" regard. "We want to thank you for the gift of your television program—and the wonderful messages you communicate,"

---

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 23.

she continues. Kathy commends Rogers on the “quality” programming he provides for Amira and especially for the ways that he pays special attention to process.

Your focus on processes of learning, thinking, feeling, and imagining have been a very constructive and important part of Amira’s development. Particularly in a world that is preoccupied with instantaneous products and superficial fragments of experience, your focus on process has helped me teach Amira about the importance of long term relationships with both people and ideas.

Kathy’s keen observation about the ways Rogers values process on *MRN* are notable in light of the underlying philosophy that informed dialogical communication ethics, especially in regard to its emphasis on lived experience.

Thomlison points to the existentialist philosophy of the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries, more specifically “religious existentialism,” as foundational in creating the categories of thought upon which the modern understanding of dialogue is built.<sup>101</sup> The era in which existentialism developed, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has been described as “organic forms of life everywhere reduced to mechanical and automatic ones, with everything spiritual turning animal, with free self-determination replaced by rigid coercion.”<sup>102</sup> In response to these reductionist, restrictive, and coercive characteristics of modernity, the existential philosophers, e.g., Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Sartre, and Gabriel Marcel raised concerns about the rising phenomenon of “self-serving individualism” and “selfless collectivism.” In a world of increasing constrictions on the individual, the existentialists theorized a way of breaking through the emerging oppressive structures through the following assumptions. First, they asserted that human beings are free to make choices – an assertion rejecting of deterministic

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>102</sup> Hanns E. Fischer, ed. *Existentialism and Humanism: Three Essays by Karl Jaspers* (New York: Russell R. Moore, 1952) 8.

approaches to human nature. Second, they posited that we live in three inseparable worlds – one that is biological or physical, one that is characterized by interrelationship and mutual awareness, and one grounded in self-identity. For the existentialists, each new relationship is conceived as individual and unique and we are called to support and respect the freedom of the other in any communication transaction.<sup>103</sup> The third assumption, and the one that relates most notably to Kathy’s concern regarding process, advances the belief that we are constantly in a state of change and transition.

We are always evolving, becoming, or emerging, the existentialists contended. Notably, this position diverged from the traditional narratives that sought to explain human behavior and existence from the perspective of fundamental ideas that were thought to have emerged from *reasoning*, and not from “lived experience.” The traditional enlightenment metanarrative of human existence, which explained our behaviors and existence as following standard patterns and guidelines, was, therefore, rejected by the existentialists, who embraced experiencing as a means of understanding and as a way of evolving our own meanings and views. This experiential perspective broke free of the dominant paradigm of scientific measurement and mechanization that became dominant in the mid-late nineteenth century.<sup>104</sup> “There are aspects of human beings which are not measurable and yet they exist,” the existentialists radically asserted.<sup>105</sup> For them, knowledge is produced through the process of looking—both at ourselves and at the outside externals. From here we gain an increased awareness of the

---

<sup>103</sup> Thomlison, *Toward Interpersonal Dialogue*, 42.

<sup>104</sup> It is important to note that this emphasis on experiential learning was later embraced by education philosopher, John Dewey, whose aims and methods, which we discussed in an earlier chapter, are also resonant on *MRN*.

<sup>105</sup> Thomlison, *Toward Interpersonal Dialogue*, 44.

self and the world that expands beyond the mere acceptance of some sort of “objective reality.”<sup>106</sup>

As Kathy keenly observed, Rogers places value in learning through the process of living and experiencing the self and the world (which includes both the material world and others). Interestingly, she contrasts this ‘way of knowing’ not with the rhetoric of scientific measurement and rote learning as did the early existentialists, but rather with the emerging characteristics and values of her own postmodern moment, characterized by increasing fragmentation, instant gratification, superficiality, and conspicuous consumption. Rogers’ focus on process, she implies, is at odds with a culture that is ‘preoccupied with instantaneous products and superficial fragments of experience.’ In contrast with these emerging characteristic of late capitalism, Rogers, Kathy observes, attends to a more humanistic ethos of meaning-making by way of an emphasis on *process* and becoming. Rogers’ attention to the process of learning through experience, whether it be about the self (e.g., one’s feelings), a material object (e.g., an electric car), an other (e.g., neighbor Francois Clemmons), or an act of creation (e.g., how crayons are made), turns away from the lens of commodification and toward the existential subject and his free interactions with the world around him. This focus, she insightfully asserts, teaches her child about the “importance of life long relationships with both people and ideas.”

Thomlison credits this “humanistic-existential approach to communication” as altering the way we perceive the communication process itself, as “it becomes a process of experiencing our physical, interpersonal, and self-identity worlds in the present tense, as well as a process of moving toward becoming all that we have the potential of

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 45.

being.”<sup>107</sup> How interesting that in her analysis, Kathy draws parallels between Rogers’ focus on process and a pedagogy that stresses the importance of relationships with both people and ideas. For the existentialists, Thomlison notes, “authentic existence *is* communication” and “dialogue *is* life.”<sup>108</sup> Hence, for them, dialogue (as opposed to monologue) is the ultimate mode of human expression.

Kathy tells Rogers that as an educator who “prizes thinking and focusing on a task,” she highly values the way that Rogers concentrates on a particular concept throughout one program and develops it an idea or narrative over the duration of several days. She credits him in helping to “dissuade children from the unhealthy that commercial television often fosters in children – that there are quick, easy and simple solutions all of life’s problems.”<sup>109</sup> Where dialogue creates the conditions for persons to “become” through a process of mutual, interactive exchange, monologue carries with it the tendency to “command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit.” In her description of the ways commercial children’s television deceives viewers by way of programming that repeatedly displays both quick fixes for problems and instantaneous production, Kathy points to these proclivities of monologue.

As noted in earlier chapters, Rogers critiqued commercial children’s television for doing just that – teaching children that problems can be solved in unrealistic ways and at unrealistic speeds. In “Children’s Television: What the Church Can Do About It,” he wrote about how

A steady diet of the weak always magically winning and the villains  
always being the big ones, of people getting flattened out one second and

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Kathy Glaser to Fred Rogers, Saint Mary’s City, MD, 18 Dec., 1981, EU Fan5, Fred Rogers Archive.

then popping into shape the next, of conniving and teasing and hurting and belittling and stopping tears with elaborate gifts (of everything imaginable that those of us who have worked and played closely with children feel they should have less of in their experiences rather than more) is a steady diet of this what we would choose to feed our children?

In this description of the interactions that occur between screen personalities, there appears to be a lack of any real acknowledgement of the other as well as a discarding of the space where processing occurs. When a cartoon character is flattened out, he quickly pops back into place without going through any process of recovery that would, notably, require the dedicated help of an other. Characters who are hurt via the act of teasing and belittling are made to feel better not via a dialogical process of reconciliation and apology, but through the act of receiving a new, material good. No attention or acknowledgment is paid to processing. Hurtful actions occur, characters quickly recover, and move on to the next thing.

In Buber's terms, we could characterize these interactions that Rogers describes as neglecting the essential space of the "between." For Buber, life is made meaningful by existential communication – a process wherein two people become more than the sum of two individuals through dialogue.

The fundamental fact of human existence is person with person. The unique thing about the human world is that something is continually happening between one person and another, something that never happens in the animal or plant world...Humans are made human by that happening...That special event begins by one human turning to another, seeing him or her as this particular other being, and offering to communicate with the other in a mutual way, building from the individual world each person experiences to a world they share together.

Here, meaning is derived through the communication transaction, Thomlison notes, not by the individuals who compose it. Further, this "between" is created only when human beings turn toward one another and offer to communicate "in a mutual way." Only in this



mutual sharing of selves can each participant move from the individual paradigm to a paradigm that both share together.

Toward the end of her letter, Kathy tells Rogers of a story that her friend recently relayed to her. The friend works in children's programming at PBS and described a lunch she had in San Francisco with Rogers and other television industry colleagues. At the lunch, she described how children in the restaurant recognized Rogers and approached him at his table. "Grace told us...of how you stopped eating and held long, thoughtful conversations with each child," Kathy writes. She writes that when her daughter heard of this story, she suggested inviting Rogers over for dinner at their lunch. Kathy describes telling her daughter that while it was unlikely that Rogers would be able to visit them, they could certainly let him know that if he is ever in the Washington, D.C. area that they would love "drive up" and to take him to lunch. Here, Kathy responds to her daughter in a way that extends the dialogical ethos between the three of them as opposed to closing the conditions of possibility.

Kathy, whose analysis of the pedagogical and social values presented on *MRN* is keen and sophisticated, demonstrates well the fluidity of conversation and mutuality that has been operating between she and Rogers via her televisual encounters with the program. In Karl Jaspers' view of existential communication, "the single Self communicates *with* the other single Self by communicating to it an incentive *to* selfhood. The evocative power of this appeal from Self to Self creates *in* the world a community of inwardly grounded Selves..."<sup>110</sup> This kind of communication facilitates the movement of one self "authentically entering" into a relation with an other self – an encounter that

---

<sup>110</sup> Fritz Kaufman, "Karl Jaspers and a Philosophy of Communication," in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor, 1957), 230-31.

emerges from individual freedom. It creates, according to Thomlison, “a community of dyads or interpersonal relationships.”<sup>111</sup> The quality of authentic communication in Kathy’s letter speaks to the ways that Rogers presents himself (to her) on his program. For individuals must be candidly engaged in a mutual attempt to develop common ground in order for “the mutual, reciprocal, dialogic exchange to grow.” Kathy, and, of course, the other letter writers, must sense from Rogers a genuine attempt to develop, through existential communication, this common ground between “I and Thou.” Karl Jaspers describes this process as follows.

In existential communication I feel responsible not only for myself but also for the other, as if he were I and I were he. I feel the beginning of existential communication only when the other meets me in the same way...If the other does not become himself in his action, neither do I. Neither the submission nor the domination of the other permits me to become myself. Only in mutual recognition do both of us become ourselves.

Kathy recognizes in Rogers’ communication ethos the feeling that he cares for her and her daughter. Of course, we can point to the obvious rhetorical display of Rogers’ existential communication in his opening song, in which he asks the viewer to be his neighbor and the redundancy of his line ‘you are special,’ but, as we have discussed, this rhetoric of mutuality and care unfolds continuously throughout each episode in various rhetorical forms.

Kathy concludes her letter by telling Rogers how much she and her daughter value and appreciate the “warmth, caring, and understanding” that he “brings into [their] home.” She thanks him for the many gifts he gives them everyday and wishes him a

---

<sup>111</sup> Thomlison, *Toward Interpersonal Dialogue*, 48.

holiday season filled with “love, renewed energy, and many delightful surprises.”

### Letters from Professionals

Other adults write to Rogers from professional perspectives, illustrating the ways they found the program of use for various pedagogical pursuits. Gary P. Gormin of the Law Offices of Gormin, Geoghegan, Covert & Green in Clearwater, Florida typed a letter to Family Communication, Inc. in December of 1981. In direct and concise prose, he requests five copies of Rogers’ “Talking with Families about Divorce” booklets, which he read about in his local newspaper, *The St. Petersburg Times*, in a November 29 article. Gary writes that he plans to make the booklets available to his clients.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, Anne P. Copeland a professor in the Department of Psychology at Boston University sent Rogers a brief request for “the pamphlet ‘Talking with Families About Divorce.’” She notes that she is an “old Pittsburgher” who grew up watching Josie Carey’s *Children’s Hour*. Like Gary, she read an article in her local paper, *The Boston Globe*, in which Rogers discusses divorce.<sup>113</sup>

Mary Beth Hagamen, a child psychiatrist living in Melville, New York writes to tell Rogers how a program gave her “hope and enthusiasm” about television.<sup>114</sup> As a director of a Children’s Hospital, she has felt “a great need to help families ‘parent’ and at her institution she has helped develop classes for parents of “overactive or autistic,” or emotionally disturbed children. “There are so many things to communicate to parents as well as to children,” she writes noting that she would enjoy having the opportunity to talk

---

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Gary P. Gormin to Fred Rogers, 1 Dec., 1981, Folder 14, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

<sup>113</sup> Anne P. Copeland to Fred Rogers. Nov. 1981, Folder 14, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

<sup>114</sup> Mary Beth Hagamen to Fred Rogers, undated, Folder 2, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

with Rogers about it some time. Mary Beth shares with Rogers that she wishes to return to Pittsburgh in the near future and create an “Institute on Life Craft,” which she describes as a loosely structured idea for an organization that models an “extended family.” This Institute, she writes, could “help people explore and experience the joy of raising children” by focusing on helping high-risk families” and helping “promote maternal bonding and infant stimulation.” “I could go on and on,” she writes as she closes the letter by reiterating her interest in children and western Pennsylvania. Again, she repeats the idea that perhaps she and Rogers could meet some time to discuss their mutual interests. “Many thanks for an awakening of the positive powers of t.v.,” she concludes.

On a notepad that reads “Union Free School District No. 2, Uniondale, L.I.,” Wilma Caldwell, S.N.T. penned a brief memo to Rogers requesting 200 copies of publications that she intends to use for the instruction of her health classes.<sup>115</sup> In the “To:” field, Wilma has written “Family Communications.” In the header between “Union Free School District” and “Health Office Memo” she has written “Northern Parkway School.” Her letter, which is a straight-forward request for materials, lists the publications she wishes to receive. They are:

1. Having an Operation
2. Wearing a Cast
3. Dentist
4. Beginning School
5. Separation & Divorce

She closes simply with the address where to send the publications.

---

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Wilma Caldwell, 24 Nov., 1981, Folder 14, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

On February 27, of 1975, Dottie Jeffries, Director of the Early Childhood Education Center in Denver, Colorado, wrote to Mister Rogers proclaiming that she watches the program daily with her children. The address places this Education Center at the Mount Olive Lutheran Church. “We agree so much with your philosophy,” she writes.<sup>116</sup> Dottie asks Rogers for information from Family Communications, Inc. that he feels she could use. She declares that she has a Master’s Degree in Child Guidance and a “Minor in Religion.” She works with the parents of ninety-six children who “are very interested in values, music appreciation, family film discussions, etc.”

While these letters are not deeply infused with ethical emotionality, they do illustrate Rogers’ pedagogical efficacy and the diversity of dialogical communication he inspired. These professionals write to Rogers with an interest in utilizing the educational content that they think is present on *MRN*. Like the other letter writers, these professionals view Rogers as a person whom they can converse with directly through the medium of letters. Each writer finds particular educational value in the televisual content that Rogers produces. A few seek to obtain the tangible printed materials that discuss the subjects of interest to them that Rogers presented on the screen. Clearly, they think that the content may be useful to their clients or students.

### **Respectful Disagreement**

It is important to note that not all the letters that Rogers were received were favorable toward his program. While some viewers wrote to suggest programming topics and approaches, others engaged in strong criticism of the ways in which Rogers discussed

---

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Dottie Jeffries, 27 Feb., 1975, Folder 2, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

various issues. I would like to close the chapter with a discussion of these letters as they illustrate further dynamism and diversity amongst the viewer mail library. Moreover, they demonstrate how viewers who disagreed with a particular program's discourse felt that engaging with Rogers via lettered correspondence was a proper response and something that was in their power to do.

Let us begin by examining a letter written by Frances Cunnane, a mother of three children from Westchester, Pennsylvania. Writing on February 27, 1981, Frances begins her letter to "Mr. Rogers" with a compliment. "Your regular programs are unquestionably the best children's programs on TV," she writes. "You have always treated children with dignity and you have respected the different backgrounds from which they come." However, Frances continues, "your series on divorce, I believe, departed from that tradition." Frances writes that she does not believe that a children's television program should deal with an issue that is both a social problem and a "moral, religious, spiritual, and deeply personal family problem." In a rhetorical move that places her in solidarity with Rogers, she notes her recognition of the rising divorce rate in American society and then notes that "some parents may not deal with it the way you or I believe they should." Here, Frances tries to align her sense of morality with Rogers. She communicates her solidarity with Rogers by alluding to the sense that she understands his desire to "educate" those parents who are in need of instruction on how best to deal with divorce. "Nevertheless," she writes, "parents have the natural and exclusive right to deal with it as they deem fit whether or not you or I disagree with their method."

There are some areas of child-rearing where I disagree with the values of my neighbors, for example, but I do not have the right even when my children are in their temporary care to inculcate the children with our own family's religious values. In my religion, 'discussing your feelings' with

outsiders about personal family failings or problems is a serious breach of charity. In the ethical order, it undermines family loyalty and the parent-child relationship.

Frances notes that bringing up issues regarding divorce on *MRN* can have the negative effect of producing unnecessary anxiety for children for whom divorce is not an issue. For example, Frances' children never thought of the possibility of going down the drain in the bathtub until Rogers addressed this common anxiety on his program. Only after they viewed Rogers' discussion of this imagined fear on *MRN* did her children begin to become frightened while taking a bath. "There are things which are better treated only if and when they arise on a child-parent basis," she concludes.

Frances' detailed and emphatic letter of critique demonstrates how she perceives herself as a stakeholder in *MRN* and in dialogue with the program host. It is because she understands her position as viewer *not* as a passive receiver but rather as an active participant in a cultural dialogue that she feels comfortable and, indeed, prompted to offer her perspective and impressions to Rogers.

We teach our children that problems between people arise when people grow away from God. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors in general can only treat human problems very superficially. It is my hope that you will leave matters like this to parents in the future and return to your usually excellent material.

It is difficult to understand where exactly Frances has placed Rogers in this final paragraph of her letter. One might deduce that because Rogers refrains from employing any religious language on his program, Frances has placed him in the category of modern, secular professionals who she believes can only "treat" human problems at the superficial level. And indeed, Rogers' discourse on divorce addresses the topic from a secular, psychological perspective and not overtly from a religious one.

Frances makes clear that she does not think Rogers' intervention into a family matter as private and personal as divorce should be the topic of discussion on a children's television program. Indeed, she is making an ethical appeal based on the cultural and religious understanding that there are personal matters which should be left entirely to the realm of private, family life. She sees Rogers as overstepping his "appropriate" reach as a television producer by discussing such matters in what she likely considers the public space of broadcasting. Frances' complaint demonstrates the collapsing of the public and private realms that television is rapidly bringing about. She clearly feels that Rogers has overstepped his bounds as a television personality by addressing a subject that was traditionally reserved for discussion only within the very private space of the family. Yet, as Rogers observed at the beginning of his venture into the medium, the television's placement in the home space will (and has) resulted in public communication entering the family culture in a highly personal way. It has also resulted in the creation of programming produced with a sense of the intimacy of the domestic viewing space in mind. Indeed, it is no surprise that Rogers used his forum to address the troubling rise in divorce rates during the period, since his interest as a pastor and child development specialist was to assist families in their struggles through the powerful tool of television communication.

Frances notes that Rogers' address on divorce violates her religious mores. She departs from the premise that divorce is a "family failing." Thus, to discuss it in public would involve shaming those who have been involved in it. She views the absence of discussions of the subject in the public sphere as a charity to those who have gone through it. The public discussion of divorce, she writes, is "a serious breach of charity"



because it ostensibly lays out people's dirty laundry for public voyeurism. Frances' letter illustrates the relative novelty of Rogers' philosophy and psychology's teachings on the expression of open talk about feelings and issues that were formerly taboo. Her concerns are representative of the still-dominant mores of an old Protestant American culture in which matters relating to the personal and emotional aspects of individuals and families remain in the realm of the private. To her, Rogers' decision to discuss them on television is not only a "breach of charity" to those who have dealt with divorce, but also a breach of the normative consensus about what is appropriate for discussion in public and what is reserved for the private sphere. Her letter demonstrates the cultural struggles surrounding the novel approaches to children and family life, such as the open discussion of feelings, that Rogers (informed by McFarland, Spock, and Erikson) engaged with on his television program.

Rogers also received complaints from those on the other side of the political spectrum. One such letter was written by Linda Levgnino on June 23, 1975. Linda begins her letter with a direct criticism of an *MRN* song. "Dear Mr. Rogers, I want you to know how terribly disappointing it is to listen to the song 'What do you do?'" she writes.<sup>117</sup> Linda's complaint regards a line in the song where Rogers sings "For a girl to be some day a lady/ and a boy can be some day a man." "You confound lady/gentleman and man/woman," she explains. Expressing her own modern perspective on this language, she continues, "I don't think girls want to grow up to be ladies anymore that boys want to grow up to be gentlemen." To further her point, she notes that she wishes for her

---

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Linda Levgnino, 23 June, 1975, Folder 4, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

daughters to become women. “Ladies sit with their legs together; women live,” she declares.

In addition, she notes her strong dislike for the way the song’s tonal inflection favors the boy as primary and places the girl as a kind of secondary afterthought. “My second objection is to the incidental character of the girl’s line as compared to the triumphant emphasis of the boy’s line.” She says this makes her “feel sick” and suggests that Rogers tries singing “For a boy can be some day a gentleman/ And a girl can be some day a woman!” instead.

Linda closes her brief but poignant letter by telling Rogers, “otherwise, I love you to pieces.” She also shares with him her wish that he produce a show, book, or records for “grownups,” noting that “we really need you.” Notably, her signature reads, “Love, Linda,” and includes a postscript that details how “terrific” it was for her family to see him in person at KCET, Southern and Central California’s community radio station.

While Frances calls for Rogers to refrain from addressing “private matters” on his television program, Linda advocates for adjustment and correction. Both seek to influence Rogers’ production via letter writing and address their concerns from their own cultural and political perspectives. Both appear to be equally outraged by particular choices made by Rogers and both feel a strong affinity for his program in general. Thus, they seek to influence him via a dialogical communication ethic that involves constructive criticism. They both note how much they like him and his program but find value in voicing to him the areas which they find disturbing.

I was able to locate a response to Linda’s letter from producer Hedda Sharapan, which further emphasizes the dialogical stance that *MRN* assumed at all levels of

programming and public relations. Nearly a month after Linda wrote into the *Neighborhood*, Sharapan typed and sent her a response. In it, she thanks Linda for her comments, noting that “as growing people, we need to open to remarks such as you wrote.”<sup>118</sup> Sharapan reveals that Linda was not alone in her critique of the gender politics embedded in the song, “What Do You Do With The Mad That You Feel.” In fact, she writes, after receiving a similar letter the year previous, “Fred Rogers changed that song to end with... ‘A girl can be someday a woman, and a boy can be someday a man.’” She notes that while they have not been able to dub over past programs that re-air from time to time, the song’s lyrics have been revised in this regard. Further, she writes, the staff are currently engaged in a “re-evaluation project” in which they are going over past series to create a library of “2-year showings.” “One of our concerns,” writes Sharapan, “is the sexist remarks that were made on early programs in the late 1960s but are inappropriate today.”

Here, Sharapan acknowledges the direct link between the current reevaluation and Linda’s criticism, but also ties the current actions of *MRN* to a self-identified recognition of the need to revise and adjust in accordance with the newer social norms, which clearly they accept. “It was good to know what our group’s visit to KCET meant to your family,” she concludes, “Your thoughtful comments will always be welcome.”

Sharapan communicates authenticity in her direct, honest, and straightforward response. She provides accurate detail about the ways Linda’s complaint has been addressed and acknowledges her comments as valuable and legitimate. Indeed, she emphasizes at the beginning of the letter how dialogue between viewers and producers,

---

<sup>118</sup> Hedda Sharapan to Levgnino, 24 July, 1975, Folder 4, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.

more specifically letters of observation and critique from viewers, help producers to grow. Here, she strategically identifies herself and the *MRN* producers as “growing people,” eliminating the professional terminology that places her in a different category as Linda and instead unites them in solidarity at the level of human beings. Still, her letter is direct, honest, and straight-forward, communicating the essential dialogical qualities of authenticity, inclusion, presentness, confirmation, and mutual equality.

### **Conclusion: Dialogic Communication Ethics and the Good**

In identifying difference as the defining characteristic of postmodernity, wherein competing understandings of the truth comprise the dominant discursive lens from which we view the world, Arnett et al. posit that the postmodern moment, rooted in the reality of difference and pluralism, requires “a public mapping of a sense of the good”.<sup>119</sup> In examining philosophical and other mission-focused documents written by Rogers during the foundational years of the program’s creation and execution, it is clear that Rogers, in witnessing the troubling social and political tumult of the 1960s, identified a crisis of values – a crisis of the society’s sense of the good and how to foster it.

In July 29, 1969, Rogers testified before a session chaired by Congressman William S. Moorhead entitled, “Opportunity for Creative Work Needed in Our Country’s Educational System.” In his remarks, he spoke of the reasons why, in his view, the youth of the country were revolting, turning away from virtue and creativity and towards “alleys and cellars and nudity and pot.” Rogers identified the progression in the school

---

<sup>119</sup> Arnett et al., 9.

system from preschool's encouragement of creative engagement to an overwhelming amount of non-creative work in the elementary, middle, and high schools. "It is my conviction that the Youth who are in revolt are being revolted by our failure to know who they really are," he said.

They are tired of being enrolled, assigned, programmed, graded and molded from without. They are weary of the passive-verbs of education and they want to work at their own developmental level of becoming who they really are.<sup>120</sup>

Rogers then paints the picture of a nursery school child, building highways and skyscrapers with wooden blocks, who, twelve years later learns that everything he cared about in school wherein he feels that he was creating, was somewhere along the way labeled "extra-curricular." "The child's own growth tasks, his own inner ways of coping with his environment, as well as his feelings, were all labeled as unimportant and the business of memorizing somebody else's book and doing what he's told became the only was to PASS."<sup>121</sup> He then speaks about the values he places on children's creativity in his "television visit[s]." The object of these visits, he states, is to "remind children that each one of them is unique and that each one has something special to bring to any relationship." After such value is communicated, he notes that he is only now able to teach social and cognitive lessons, emphasizing the primary importance of his articulation of the child's unique worth.

The child's real triumphs are reflected in his abilities to cope with his own feelings to make the most of his own unique endowment and those are the triumphs that I applaud. It is a person's creativity which allows him to make something of himself. It is this natural human creativity for which I

---

<sup>120</sup> Rogers, "Opportunity for Creative Work Needed in Our Educational System," Cong. Rec. 29 July 1969: E6404-E6405.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

have such deep respect. It is this creativity which must be fostered far beyond the five-year-olds.<sup>122</sup>

Here we can see how Rogers' philosophy emerges from an assessment of the crises of his time, a task emphasized as essential for the role of minister by public Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen, Rogers' contemporary and friend. From this analysis of the systemic, institutional problems affecting the young people of his time, Rogers puts forth his prescription for repair and reform. He always begins his communication transaction with the viewer by reminding the viewer of her unique worth. Only after this has been established can Rogers "teach social and cognitive lessons," in as much as having worth requires the recognition of the other.

While one might be tempted to draw parallel connections between Fred Rogers' approach to dialogue and the humanistic, psychological dialogue of Carl Rogers, I would argue that Fred Rogers' approach more accurately falls within Martin Buber's phenomenological dialogue. This distinction is an important one because it speaks once again to the reasons why presuppositions or narrative commitments matter in regards to communication and interpretation.

Carl Rogers' understanding of dialogue holds the psyche at the center of its departure. In contrast, the "between" is at the center of Buber's dialogical understanding, which approaches dialogue from a phenomenological view. Indeed, Carl Rogers uses language similar to Fred Rogers in asserting that, through dialogue, people are able to "get in touch" with one's "real self." But, as Arnett clarifies, Carl Rogers' "emphasis on 'internal locus of control' results in communicative meaning being possessed inside the person." Buber rejects this notion, as does, it would seem, Fred Rogers, who builds

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

learning, growth, and self-discovery around the dialogical imperatives of the social, and, more specifically, the other and the “between.” “A dialogic perspective rejects the psychologistic assertion that a human being is a set of owned potentials that construct the abstract notion of a ‘real self’; instead individuals must be sensitive to what is called for by the situation.”<sup>123</sup> It is thus the space of “the between,” as identified by Buber, where the dialogical occurs and unfolds. From this perspective, “the psychological, that which happens within the souls of each, is only the secret accompaniment to the dialogue.” That is to say that the meaning of any dialogue is found in neither of the two dialogical partners or each of them combined together, but rather in and within their interchange.<sup>124</sup>

While the psychological emphasizes becoming oneself by developing one’s own potentials, Rogers’ approach operates within Buber and Friedman’s situational framework, wherein a person may have to abandon her potential in order to “honestly answer an invited dialogue from another.” This is the case with Julie Cruise, who must, if only a little bit at first, abandon her perspective in order to accommodate the rhetorical situation. It is in this process of meeting Mister Rogers and putting aside her prejudices that she finds meaning in “the between” where she slowly experiences self-transformation. “Being means responding without letting the potential help or harm to oneself limit one’s answer. An individuals’ response must be called for by the situation and by his or her role, not the potentialism of humanistic communication.”<sup>125</sup> When the focus is on that which occurs in the “between,” Buber notes, there should sometimes exist a struggle between what one feels and that which one says or does. Indeed, Cruise often

---

<sup>123</sup> Arnett, “Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 45 (1981): 203.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Arnett, “Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue,” 204.

experiences this tension, yet she returns to the dialogue because she finds, in the ‘between,’ a personal shift towards something good.

Because Carl Rogers views the human as innately good, dialogue, from his perspective, is encouraged to unleash the psyche in the hopes of drawing out organismic desires and inner reflections. Fred Rogers does not engage in such a practice. Rather, he creates a space for dialogue, critical thinking, and learning to take place within the space of a dialogical “between” that is guided by both ethical conversation and creative play. He does not forget his role as teacher in his relationship with the viewer, to promote both dialogue and creative thought and activity. “Such an understanding of intentionality implies the acceptance of a non-subject/object world view in which the meaning of a communication happening emerges ‘between’ persons, not in each person’s internal perceptions or through environmental control.”<sup>126</sup> This position puts ethics before being as first philosophy, as articulated by Levinas, who posits an ethics of being for the other before oneself.<sup>127</sup> For Levinas, the “I” finds identity in response to the other, as does Julie Cruise. It is, thus, of particular importance for understanding Fred Rogers as he works from an ethical ‘I and Thou’ premise within a culture of supreme individualism.

Following Levinas’ ethical framework, albeit unintentionally, Fred Rogers speaks to a “culture of narcissism”<sup>128</sup> through the countering act of dialogical invitation, which he honed and practiced during his studies in pastoral counseling at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and in the child development laboratory setting of the Arsenal Family and Children’s Center. Rogers actively creates a space of co-construction, in which both he

---

<sup>126</sup> Arnett, “Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue,” 206-7.

<sup>127</sup> Ronald Arnett, “A Dialogic Ethic ‘Between’ Buber and Levinas,” 81.

<sup>128</sup> See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).



and his dialogical partner learn from one another in the space “between.” Moreover, in regards to the subject matter we have been discussing in this paper, that which is created in the “between” space on *MRN* continues its communication path of becoming in the acts of letter writing.

Thus, by consistently establishing and reestablishing a dialogical conversation between himself and viewers, and through repetition of similar messages that express value for the unique worth of his viewer, Rogers is able to reach the viewer’s inner child, regardless of age and pull them into the “between” space with him. Careful to maintain a rhetoric of care, respect, safety, and appreciation, he creates this place of sharing and ethical exchange wherein both he and his viewer cognitively communicate with each other from the spiritual space of interiority, wherein the deeper, most authentic feelings and primordial ethical sense of ‘I and Thou,’ reside. Because Rogers tends to reach viewers on this deeper dialogical level of communication on *MRN*, many identify in Rogers an interlocutor and treat him as such by writing letters to him.

Consistent with his philosophy for *MRN*, Rogers named his production company, “Family Communications,” emphasizing how he viewed mass communications from the perspective of intergenerational and interpersonal human communication working within the domestic social unit of the family. The recognition of this intentional positionality harkens to the anecdote with which we began our discussion. It features a letter written by a mother, who describes her son walking around the house singing the *MRN* song, “You’ve Got To Do It.” When her husband returns from work early, she notes, he joins in viewing *MRN*, and they talk about it for days afterwards. This story exemplifies Rogers’ initial hope for the show as he was charged to minister to children and families through

television. In the early years of *MRN*, Margaret McFarland wrote about the importance of recognizing television's physical positioning in the home and its inherent effects on family communication. Rogers thus structured his program to address the concerns of the family and integrated his host persona into the communication context of the domestic. Although in our contemporary social, mass communication environment television co-viewing is no longer the norm, recent social-scientific studies have shown, as we might expect considering our current discussion, that this practice can have beneficial learning effects on children.<sup>129</sup>

Finally, Rogers' Christian background, along with his studies in child development, are critical pieces for understanding *MRN* and his wider professional projects as they inform his artistic and pedagogical choices. Although I have addressed some of these elements in this chapter, the space afforded does not permit a more extensive analysis, which I intend do in my forthcoming book on *MRN*. In this chapter, I have shown how Rogers effectively deployed a profound understanding of the dialogic method of communication and education through an analysis of viewer lettered correspondence and philosophical documents authored by Rogers.

---

<sup>129</sup> See Melissa Morgenlander, "Adult-child co-viewing of educational television: Enhancing Preschoolers Understanding of Mathematics Shown on *Sesame Street*" (PhD diss. Columbia University, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation challenges mainstream narratives about Fred Rogers that paint his project with a monochrome brush of Christian “progressivism” and reveals the nuance and complexity of his thought, the dialogical integration of his various influences, and the intentionality and care with which he strived to create a program that would speak to the affective, cultural, and educational needs of young children and, in turn, people of all ages during a period of social, political, and cultural upheaval and technological change in the U.S. It provides an interdisciplinary, complex, and dynamic perspective on how Rogers’ communication efforts succeeded in reaching generations of Americans at the interpersonal and affective levels within an arguably heightened parasocial plain over the course of more than thirty years on the Public Broadcasting Service.

Breakthroughs in neurological research over the past twenty years are only now beginning to reveal and confirm scientifically the critical socio-emotional oriented practices and dialogical ways of relating that Rogers, McFarland, Erikson, Bowlby and others were discovering and employing beginning in the mid-twentieth century. For example, the research of University of Virginia Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology Jim Coan has revealed that social proximity, peer bonding, and soothing behaviors facilitate the development of non-anxious temperament and inhibit the release of stress hormones. Rogers experienced the converse of this first-hand as a boy, social subordination, rejection, and isolation are powerful sources of stress that threaten both

psychological and physical health.<sup>1</sup> I show how Rogers (and his behind-the-scenes collaborator, McFarland) presciently recognized in television the parasocial possibilities for making the critical embodied social-emotional communication connections that human beings need to function and cope with life's struggles.

In this regard, he ritually established on *MRN* the critical orientation of “ethical emotionality” necessary, as posited by Burggraeve, for a holistic and moral education. In beginning every encounter by establishing a place of “emotional safety” for the viewer through embodied and enacted visual and verbal rhetorics of care and connection, Rogers demonstrates former University of Illinois Brain-Body Center Director Stephen Porges’ very recent neurophysiological findings on how the feeling of safety is a fundamental requirement for optimizing human potential, bolstering at the neuro-scientific level Burggraeve’s theory of “ethical emotionality” and Arnett, Bell, and Fritz’s argument for “dialogical learning as first principle in communication ethics.”<sup>2</sup> According to Porges, who is now Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina, “the neurophysiological processes associated with feeling safe are a prerequisite not only for social behavior but also for accessing both the higher brain structures that enable humans to be creative and generative and the lower brain structures involved in regulating health, growth, and restoration.”<sup>3</sup> Recall that in Chapter 2, Rogers’ “Encouraging Creativity” speech drew upon the writings of Erikson to expand on this idea and to bolster his own thesis that a major goal of education must be “to help students discover an awareness of

---

<sup>1</sup> See Jim Coen’s “Creating Connections” website, <http://www.creatingconnections.nl/social-baseline-theory-and-the-social-regulation-of-emotion1.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See Ronald C. Arnett, LeeAnne M. Bell, and Janie M. Harden Fritz, “Dialogical Learning as First Principle in Communication Ethics,” *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 18.3 (2010): 111-26.

<sup>3</sup> See “Stephen Porges, Clinical Applications of the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe, June 14-18, 2014,” *The Cape Cod Institute*, [http://www.cape.org/2014/stephen\\_porges.html](http://www.cape.org/2014/stephen_porges.html).

their own unique selves in order to increase their feelings of personal worth, responsibility, and freedom.” Here, Rogers articulates in language his ritual enactment of “emotional safety,” to use Porges’ term, ties it directly to the learning process and, earlier in the speech, connects it to the broader community/socius by noting its implications for national health and societal success.

When I first embarked on this dissertation project, I intentionally, though perhaps somewhat naively, conceptualized it in the broadest of ways. I planned to examine and analyze the program from the three primary aspects of the television event – conception, production, and reception. I aimed to investigate the rhetorical and cultural meanings of *MRN* from the intersections of American and religious studies – a broad undertaking to say the least. And indeed it was. The more I began to research Rogers’ writings on television and his life experience, the foundational works in television studies, critical concepts in attachment theory and child development (an area of study I had not yet encountered in my academic experience), the programs themselves, and the correspondence from viewers, the more the reasons behind Rogers’ success as a televisual communicator, educator, and in many ways, as a kind of minister became clear and remarkably profound. At times, I felt as though my efforts to delimit the project’s scope and direction were a fool’s errand.

Once I opened the door to better grasp one facet of *MRN* (for example Rogers’ prescient comprehension of the parasocial experience), another perspective of understanding would reveal an inherent and significant connection, for example Ong’s understanding of oral and embodied communication and its relationship to what he calls “secondary orality” – the relatively new oral culture created by electronic mass

communication technologies. What I found in the inherent consequences of conceptualizing the project in such a broad scope was the reality of Buber's claim that "all real living is meeting"<sup>4</sup> and the complex verity of Bakhtin's discovery that "life is dialogical by its very nature."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, my own anthropological examination into Rogers' rhetorics, which I performed through in-depth, dialectical inquiries into the various experiences that shaped Rogers' values and thinking, has produced yet another vast layer of dialogical knowledge about the intersections of television, education, and the imperatives of healthy social-emotional relationships and practices.

I have tried to show how Rogers' communication project came into being, the ways he negotiated his media project within the postwar cultural landscape, the means by which he integrated new forms of knowledge and understanding about human development into his overarching ministerial goals, and the diligent and meticulous ways that he honed and manipulated the televisual medium to connect at the relational level with a vast number of Americans at the social-emotional level. I have further illustrated how Rogers successfully translated sophisticated child development theory and knowledge on best behavioral, cultural, and social practices to a mass public by way of mass media representations of oral cultural practices characterized by embodied communication acts. Moreover, in an effort to tackle the communication process of the program from all critical perspectives, I have shown the success of Rogers' dialogical methods of engagement through a detailed and thorough exploration and analysis of viewer mail that speaks not only to the parasocial nature of episodic television itself but

---

<sup>4</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, "Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle," trans. Wlad Godzich, in *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 13 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 97.

more importantly, for this project, to the ways that dialogical enactment undergirded by social-emotional bonding techniques can result in meaningful learning, engagement, and processing.

Accordingly, I organized this dissertation chronologically in regards to the communication process, which ultimately repeats itself in an infinitesimal and nonlinear dialogical loop. After introducing my topic and methodology, I began by investigating the socio-cultural milieu of the postwar period in relation to perspectives on electronic media technology and domestic space for the purposes of properly situating Rogers' vision in the historical, discursive moment. The second chapter departed from this situational foundation by delving into an examination of the critical and complementary knowledges of thought and experience that informed Rogers' project, values, and philosophy. In Chapter Three, I delved into the rhetorics of the program and analyze how Rogers creates, through embodied and enacted pedagogical demonstrations, a cultural dialectic of objects, people, and play that emphasizes Winnicott's key findings on social-emotional connection and the use and manipulation of objects as primary phenomena for human stability, growth, and development. Finally, in Chapter 4, I concentrated on viewer responses to *MRN* in the form of letter writing. The letters demonstrate how Rogers established deep dialogical levels of communication and emotional connections with viewers, who identify him as an interlocutor and treat him as such in their lettered address. These letters demonstrate the ways that Rogers' knowledge of attachment and the importance of establishing social-emotional bonds with people in general, but children specifically, translated through the television medium to produce heightened parasocial interaction that was both immediately resonant and long lasting.

From the production end of *MRN*, Margaret McFarland repeatedly said that “attitudes are caught, not taught.”<sup>6</sup> From the reception end of the program, a woman viewer embarking on her master’s thesis confided in Amy Hollingsworth that, “It’s uncanny how [Fred’s] simple messages of acceptance and encouragement helped me to write and be productive. I would almost hold my breath while Fred sang his songs, for so often they soothed some tender place in my heart.”<sup>7</sup> I believe this work accomplishes several tasks that can be of use to readers coming from a variety of interests and disciplinary backgrounds involving, as all of life does, the critical socio-emotional elements of communication and being.

First and foremost, this work demonstrates how Rogers’ ethos of “ethical emotionality” and his keen deployment of it at the parasocial levels of televisual communication, as evinced by the decades-long run of the program and by the overwhelmingly positive viewer response, was remarkably successful in achieving his stated goal of providing “a great service for mental health.”<sup>8</sup> Now that new neurological research evidencing the holistic health imperatives of embodied practices of affective social-emotional behaviors has affirmed the understandings of child development that earlier researchers such as Erikson, Bowlby, McFarland and Rogers’ honed and deployed, children’s television practitioners and other leaders in the televisual arts and sciences can take bold action in incorporating and integrating these enacted practices of creating and sustaining “emotional safety” into all types of programming. Further, dialogical participants in television viewing and other digital media now have at their

---

<sup>6</sup> See Sally Ann Fleker, “When Fred Met Margaret,” *PITT MED* (2014), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Hollingsworth, *Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Rogers, “Senate Testimony.”



disposal, thanks to the informational abundance that digital culture affords, a wealth of knowledge about the importance of healthy social-emotional engagement and can make choices about their electronic media consumption accordingly. This study on *MRN* will, I hope, further spread the word about “ethical emotionality,” the power of the parasocial, and the practical steps people can take toward improving their lives through adopting and fostering of healthy social-emotional behaviors in various social situations.

The work further illuminates the work of Fred Rogers and provides the in-depth, analytical reasons why his project has resonated so strongly with an American public that still turns to him during times of national and international tragedy.<sup>9</sup> With hope, my findings can shift the conversations about Rogers in mainstream media away from the kind of one-dimensional rhetoric often used to characterize his message, such as “kind,” “saintly,” and “wise,” and move toward more substantive pieces that connect Rogers’ communication techniques with the new neurological research on attachment, social-emotional bonding, and the critical importance of fostering feelings of “emotional safety.”

In these and many other ways, this dissertation provides a space for continued future questioning of the role of television and its unique place in our busied, mobile, virtual, and fragmented lives, especially as it relates to the formation of the young. It not only breaks new ground on studies of *MRN*, but establishes avenues for new inquiries into television studies, communication studies at large, and especially communication ethics. In this last regard, “‘Invisible to the Eye’: Rhetorics of Ethical Emotionality in

---

<sup>9</sup> Rogers’ advice to “look to the helpers” during times of tragedy and threat has been used in news articles and blogs after the 2013 Boston marathon terrorist attacks, the 2013 Newtown, Connecticut shootings, and the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks (amongst other violent events).

Fred Rogers' *Neighborhood*' engages in current discussions sparked by the ethical turn in the humanities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abram, Jan. *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words*.  
London: Karnac Books, 1996.
- Adelman, Mara B. Malcolm R. Parks, and Terrance L. Albrecht "The Nature of  
Friendship and Its Development." In *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About  
Interpersonal Communication*, edited by John Stewart, 303-11. New York:  
McGraw Hill Inc., 1995.
- Alasuutari, Pertti. Introduction to *Rethinking The Media Audience*.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Cultural Theory and  
Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey, 302-12. Edinburgh: Pearson,  
2009.
- Anderson, Rob, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth A. Cissna. "Texts and Contexts of  
Dialogue." In *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, edited  
by Anderson, Baxter, and Cissna, 1-18. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications,  
2004.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*. Translated by T.  
McDermott. Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1989.
- Ariès, Phillipe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by  
Robert Baldick. New York: Vintage, 1962.
- Arnett, Ronald C. "A Dialogic Ethic 'Between' Buber and Levinas." In *Dialogue:  
Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, edited by Anderson, Leslie A.  
Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna, 75-90. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004.

- . “Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue.” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 45 (1981): 201-12.
- . *Dialogic Education: Conversation Between Persons*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.
- Arnett, Ronald C., Bell, and Fritz. “Dialogical Learning as First Principle in Communication Ethics.” *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 18.3 (2010): 111-126.
- Arnett, Ronald C., Janie M. Harden Fritz, and Leeanne M. Bell. *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009.
- Arsenal Family and Children’s Center. “History.” Accessed 26 June, 2013.  
<http://www.arsenalfamily.com/history.asp>.
- Aubry, Timothy and Trysh Tavis. *Rethinking Therapeutic Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.
- Auter, Philip J. and Donald M. David. “When Characters Speak Directly to Viewers Breaking the Fourth Wall in Television.” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 68.1-2 (1991): 165-71.
- Bailey, Liberty Hyde. *The Outlook to Nature*. Revised edition. New York: Macmillan, 1991.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *Education in the Forming of American Society*. New York: Vintage Books, 1960.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. “Discourse in the Novel.” Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. In *Critical Theory Since 1965*, edited by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, 668-70. Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1986.

- . *The Dialogic Imagination*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Barnouw, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1963.
- . *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States from 1953*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- . *Tube of Plenty*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Barton, David and Nigel Hall, eds., *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin, 2000.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. Translated James Benedict. New York: Verso, 1996.
- Belcher-Hamilton, Lisa. "The Gospel According to Fred: A Visit with Mr. Rogers." *Christian Century* 111.12 (1994): 382-84.
- Bell, Daniel. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.
- Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Bender, Thomas. *Community and Social Change in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Anchor, 1967.
- Bergman, Samuel Hugo. *Dialogical Philosophy From Kierkegaard to Buber*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

- Berry, Wendell. "Health is Membership." In *The Art of the Common Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Edited by Norman Wirzba. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002.
- Bianculli, David. "The Myth, The Man, The Legend." In *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Children, Television, and Fred Rogers*. Edited by Mark Collins and Mary Kimmel. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996.
- Billig, Michael. "Commodity Fetishism and Repression: Reflections on Marx, Freud and the Psychology of Consumer Capitalism." *Theory Psychology* 9.3 (1999): 313-29.
- Bloom, Paul. "Why We Like What We Like." *Observer* 23.8 (2010).  
<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2010/october-10/why-we-like-what-we-like.html>.
- Blum, Lawrence A. *Friendship, Altruism and Morality*. New York: Routledge, 1980.
- Boden, Margaret A. *Jean Piaget*. Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1975.
- Borsodi, Ralph. *This Ugly Civilization*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1929.
- Bourne, Randolph S. "Trans-national America." *The Atlantic Monthly*. July 1916.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/16jul/bourne.htm>.
- Bowlby, Jay. *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 2. Separation*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Boyer, Paul. *Purity In Print*. New York: Scribner, 1968.
- Braithwaite, Dawn O., Kathleen M. Galvin, Benjamin Chiles, and Esther Liu. "Family Communication." In *Oxford Bibliographies in Communication*. Edited by Patricia Moy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Last modified 27 February 2013.  
<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0104.xml?rskey=NwypB4&result=41>.

*Bridgeport Telegram*. "Simpler Shows For Television Urged by 'Mr. Rogers' at Yale."

17 Oct., 1972.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. Edinburgh: T. & T.

Clark, 1950.

Burggraeve, Roger. "A Holistic Values Education: Emotionality, Rationality and Meaning." EFTRE European Conference, Järvenpää, 2004.

Burst, Daniel. *Erik Erikson and the American Psyche: Ego, Ethics, and Evolution*.

Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2006.

Butsch, Richard. *Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Caffin, Caroline. *Dancing and Dancers of Today*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1912.

Caldwell, Lesley and Angela Joyce. Editors' Introduction to "Playing: A Theoretical Statement," by Donald Winnicott, 231-34. In *Reading Winnicott*, edited by Caldwell and Joyce. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Carey, James W. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Casto, Marilyn. "The Concept of Hand Production in Colonial Revival Interiors." In *Re-creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival*, edited by Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta, 321-35. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.

Caulfield, Rich. "'Trust Yourself': Revisiting Benjamin Spock." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 26.4 (1999): 263-65.

- Coen, Jim. "Creating Connections" Website, <http://www.creatingconnections.nl/social-baseline-theory-and-the-social-regulation-of-emotion1.html>.
- Cohen, Jonathan. "Defining Identification: A Theoretical Look at the Identification of Audiences with Media Characters." *Mass Communication and Society* 4.3 (2001): 245-64.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.
- Coles, Romand. *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Collins, Claudia. "Viewer Letters as Audience Research: The Case of Murphy Brown." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 41.1 (1997): 109-31.
- Conkin, Paul. *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* Ithaca, NY: American Historical Association, 1995.
- Connell, R. W. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Cooper, Mick, Amy Chak, Flora Cornish, and Alex Gillespie. "Dialogue: Bridging Personal, Community, and Social Transformation." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53.1 (2012): 72-78.
- Costello, Denis. "Selflessness as a Virtue in Social Work Practice." *Social Work and Christianity* 40.3 (2013): 271-86.
- Cott, Nancy. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.



- Cowan, Ruth Susan. *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Cremin, Lawrence A. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1976-1957*. New York: Knopf, 1961.
- Crusalis, Bonnie Smith. "Wounded Healer." In *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, edited by David A. Leeming. New York: Springer, 2014.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Halton. *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.
- Cuddy, Amy. "Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are." TED Talk, June 2012.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en).
- . *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self To Your Biggest Challenges* (Boston: Little Brown, 2015).
- Danbom, David B. "Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America." *Agricultural History* 65.4 (1991): 1-12.
- Davies, Douglas. *Child Development: A Practitioner's Guide*. 3rd edition. New York: Guilford Press, 2011.
- Day, James. *The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- De Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. *The Little Prince*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Harcourt, 2000.

- De Toqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald Bevan (1835; New York: Penguin Classics, 2003)
- Decker, William Merrill. *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- DeNora, Tia. *Making Sense of Reality: Culture and Perception in Everyday Life*. London: Sage, 2014.
- Dhoerst, Alexander. “‘If You Asked Me...’: Exploring Autoethnography as Means to Critically Assess and Advance Audience Research,” in *Revitalizing Audience Research: Innovations in European Audience Research*, ed. Frauke Zeller, Cristina Ponte, and Brian O’Neill (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- Dooe, Mary. “How Mister Rogers shaped what it means to grow up – and live in Pittsburgh,” *Public Radio International*. 25 Sep., 2015.  
<http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-09-25/how-mr-rogers-shaped-what-it-means-grow-and-live-pittsburgh>.
- Douglas, Mary and Baron Isherwood. *The World of Goods: Towards and Anthropology of Consumption*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Douglas, Susan. *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- Douglass, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- Draper, Ellen. “Controversy Has Probably Destroyed Forever In The Context: *The Miracle* and Movie Censorship in America.” In *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*. Edited by Matthew Bernstein. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

Duke University Libraries. Digital Collections. "Built for the Future. Admiral 20ii TV. World's Most Powerful TV. Ready for UHF Stations."

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_TV0010/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_TV0010/).

Duke University Libraries. Digital Collections. "Greatest Television Achievement in Years. New Form Factor in Magnavox Design gives you 27-inch screen in compact cabinet scaled to grace the average sized room."

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_TV0018/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_TV0018/).

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica. "Slapstick Comedy." In *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/548077/>.

Ehrenrich, Barbara and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of The Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor Books, 1978.

Eichsteller, Gabriel and Sylvia Holthoff. "Social Pedagogy as an Ethical Orientation Towards Working With People –Historical Perspectives." *Children Australia* 35.4 (2011): 176-86.

*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2nd edition. Edited Donald M. Borchert. Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2006.

Engelman, Ralph. *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996.

Fischer, Hanns E., ed. *Existentialism and Humanism: Three Essays by Karl Jaspers*. New York: Russell R. Moore, 1952.

- Fitzgerald, Maureen. "National Congress of Mothers." In *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History*, edited by Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, 394. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Fleker, Sally Ann. "When Fred Met Margaret." *PITT MED* (Winter 2014).  
<http://www.pittmed.health.pitt.edu/story/when-fred-met-margaret>.
- Foss, Sonja and Cindy L. Griffin. "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric." *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 2-18.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" Translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, 124-27. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- . *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.
- Fred Rogers Archives. Fred Rogers Center. Latrobe, PA.
- Fred Rogers Company Website. "About Us." Accessed 1 July, 2013.  
<http://www.fredrogers.org/about/>.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1970.
- Galloway, Paul. "John Paul Condemns 'Culture of Death.'" *Chicago Tribune*. 31 March, 1995.
- Gans, Herbert. *Popular Culture and High Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

- Gareis, Jack and Ellen Cohn. *Communication as Culture: An Introduction to the Communication Process*. Dubuque City, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2008.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Gelber, Stephen M. *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Geraghty, Lincoln. “‘Help when times are hard’: Bereavement and Star Trek Fan Letters.” In *The Star Trek Universe: Franchising the Final Frontier*, edited by Douglas Brode and Shea T. Brode, 175-84. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- Gilbert, Douglas. *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times*. New York: Dover, 1940.
- Gilbert, James B. *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*. New York: Oxford, 1986.
- Giroux, Henry and Grace Pollock. *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*. New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010.
- Giroux, H. “Paolo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism.” Henry Giroux Website. [http://www.henryagiroux.com/online\\_articles/Paulo\\_friere.htm](http://www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/Paulo_friere.htm).
- . “Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education.” *The Giroux Reader* Boulder: Paradigm, 2006.
- . *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

- Gould, Jack. "Elvis Presley: Lack of Responsibility Is Shown by TV in Exploiting Teenagers." 16 Sep. 16, 1956. In *Watching Television Come of Age: The New York Times Reviews by Jack Gould*. Edited by Lewis L. Gould. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Gray, Jonathan and Amanda D. Lotz. *Television Studies*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012.
- Green, Lucy, *Music, Informal Learning and the School*. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2013.
- Greenfield, Patricia M. "Technology and Informal Education: What Is Taught, What Is Learned." *Science* 323.5910 (2009): 69-71.
- Greenwald, Glenn to Rogers, 11 Feb. 1982, Folder 5, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive, Latrobe, PA
- Greg Williams to Rogers, 8 May, 1981, Folder 14, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.
- Gregory, Thomas M. "Presbyterian Doctrine of Total Depravity." *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 1.27 (2007). <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-presbyterian-doctrine-of-total-depravity/>.
- Grossman, Gary H. *Saturday Morning TV*. New York: Popular Science Publishing Co., 1981.
- Gundry-Volf, Judith. "'To such as these belongs the Reign of God': Jesus and Children." *Theology Today* 56.4 (2000): 469-80.
- Gupta, Prachi. "The 10 worst Fox News interviews of the decade." *Salon Magazine*. 20 July, 2013.

- [http://www.salon.com/2013/07/30/10\\_worst\\_fox\\_news\\_interviews\\_of\\_the\\_decade](http://www.salon.com/2013/07/30/10_worst_fox_news_interviews_of_the_decade).
- Guy, William. "The Theology of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*." In *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.
- Hagaman, Mary Beth to Fred Rogers, undated, Folder 2, Box EUFan4, Fred Rogers Archive.
- Hall, Edward T. *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Anchor Books, 1966.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love, and Paul Willis, 128-38. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Hanson, Ralph E. *Mass Communication: Living in a Media World*. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016.
- Haravan, Tamara K. *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Hartmann, Tilo and Charlotte Goldhoorn. "Horton and Wohl Revisited: Exploring Viewers' Experience of Parasocial Interaction." *Journal of Communication* 61.6 (2011): 1104-21.
- Hayes, E. Karen. "Remembering Fred Rogers." *The Loyalhanna Review* (2009): 1.
- History of Head Start, Head Start Program website, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>.
- Hollingsworth, Amy. *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers: Spiritual Insights from the World's Most Beloved Neighbor*. Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2005.

- Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Holt, L. Emmett. *The Care and Feeding of Children*. New York: D. Appleton, 1894.
- Horton, Donald and Richard Wohl. "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance." *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19.3 (1956): 215-29.
- Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. New York: Roy Publishers, 1950.
- Hutchison, William R., ed. *Between The Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Isler, Bill, University of Pittsburgh Panel Event, "The Making of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, featuring Bill Isler, Hedda Sharapan, David Newell, Joanne Rogers, and Carl Kurlander, September 16, 2011.
- Ivaniushina, V. A. and D. A. Aleksandrow. "Socialization Through Informal Education: The Extracurricular Activities of Russian Schoolchildren." *Russian Education and Society* 57.4 (2015): 189-213.
- Jacobson, Lisa. *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Johannsen, Richard. "The Emerging Concept of Communication as Dialogue." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 57 (1971): 373-82.
- Jowett, Garth S., Ian C. Jarve, and Kathryn H. Fuller. *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.



- Kammen, Michael. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Kates, James. "Liberty Hyde Bailey, Agricultural Journalism, and the Making of the Moral Landscape." *Journalism History*. 36.4 (2011): 207-17.
- Kaufman, Fritz. "Karl Jaspers and a Philosophy of Communication." In *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, 211-95. New York: Tudor, 1957.
- Kimmel, Mary and Mark Collins. *The Wonder of It All: Fred Rogers and the Story of an Icon*. Latrobe, PA: Fred Rogers Center, 2008.
- Kimpton, Lawrence A. "Dewey and Progressive Education." *The School Review* 67.2 (1958): 125-27.
- Kirkus review of *The Insolent Chariot*, 17 Sep. 1958,  
<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/john-keats-2/the-insolent-chariots/>.
- Kline, Stephen. "The Making of Children's Culture." In *The Children's Culture Reader*, 95-109.
- Knaak, Stephanie. "Benjamin Spock." In *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Childhood Studies*. Edited by Heather Montgomery. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.  
<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/obo/page/childhood-studies>.
- Lasch, Christopher. *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- . *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.
- Latrobe Area Historical Society Website. "Latrobe Area History, 1800-1899."  
<http://www.greaterlatrobe.net/history/1800.htm>.

- Lears, T. J. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Lehman, Christopher P. *American Animated Cartoons of the Vietnam Era: A Study of Social Commentary in Films and Television Programs, 1961-1973*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lewis, Robert M., ed. *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America: 1830-1910*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Lewis-Kraus, Gideon. "Yelp and the Wisdom of 'The Lonely Crowd.'" *The New Yorker*. 7 May, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/yelp-and-the-wisdom-of-the-lonely-crowd>.
- Linn, Susan. *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*. New York: New Press, 2004.
- Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997.
- Long, Michael. *Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers*. Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2015.
- Lull, James. "Family Communication Patterns and the Social Uses of Television." *Communication Research* 7.3 (1980): 319-33.
- Lust, Annette. *From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond: Mimes, Pierrots, and Clowns: A Chronicle of the Many Visages of Mime in the Theater*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003.

- Machand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Mahoney, Michael S. "Technology and the Democratic Ideal: The Search for a Middle Landscape." Princeton University.  
<https://www.princeton.edu/~hos/h398/midland.html>.
- Maier, Thomas. *Dr. Spock: An American Life*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998.
- Malin, Brenton J. *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology and Emotion in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Martinson, Tom. *American Dreamscape: The Pursuit of Happiness in Postwar Suburbia*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000.
- Martocci, Laura. *Bullying: The Social Destruction of the Self*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 469-500. New York: Norton, 1978.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- McCarthy, Anna. *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America*. New York: Free Press, 2013.
- McChesney, Robert. "Conflict, Not Consensus: The Debate over Broadcast Communication Policy, 1930-1935." In *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, edited by William Samuel Solomon and McChesney, 222-58. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

- . *Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008.
- . *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- McElvaine, Robert S., ed. *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- McFarland, Margaret to Margaret Rasmussen, 1 Dec. 1966, in Fred Rogers Archive, Folder “Prof. Early Endorse,” Box EU68.
- McFarland, M. “To Whom It May Concern.” Box EU68. Fred Rogers Archives, Latrobe, PA.
- McGerr, Michael E. *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- McKim, Donald K. *Ever a Vision: A Brief History of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: 1959-2009*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Miell, Dorothy, Raymond MacDonald, and David J. Hargreaves. *Music Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Milne, Esther. *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Mister Rogers and Me*. Directed by Benjamin Wagner and Christofer Wagner. Arlington, VA: PBS, 2010.

- Morgenlander, Melissa. "Adult-child co-viewing of educational television: Enhancing Preschoolers Understanding of Mathematics Shown on *Sesame Street*." PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010.
- Morrow, Robert W. *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.
- Murray, Jeffrey. "Bakhtinian Answerability and Levinasian Responsibility: Forging a Fuller Dialogical Communicative Ethics." *Southern Communication Journal* 65.2 (2009): 133-50.
- Nasaw, David. *Children of the City*. New York: Anchor, 1985.
- Neill, A. S. *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*. McLean, VA: Hart Publishing, 1961.
- Newcomb, Horace N. "On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communication." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1.1 (1984): 34-50.
- Newell, David. Interview with the author. 19 June, 2013. Pittsburgh, PA.
- Noble, Grant. *Children in Front of the Small Screen*. London: Constable, 1975.
- Nord, David. *Faith in Reading*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- . *The Evangelical Origins of the Mass Media in America, 1815-1835*. Columbia, S.C.: Association for Education in Journalism, 1984).
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Wounded Healer*. New York: Image, 1979.
- Nunez, Gabriela. "Reading Jose Maria Arguedas' Letter: Building Communication Bridges in Mid-twentieth Century Peruvian Society." PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2015.
- Nye, David E. *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.

- Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Methuen, 1983.
- Pace, Eric. "Benjamin Spock, World's Pediatrician Dies at 94." *New York Times*. 17 March, 1998.
- Pace, Patricia. Review of Mary Collins and Mary Kimmel, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Children, Television and Fred Rogers. The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.3 (1998): 384.
- Packard, Vance. *The Hidden Persuaders*. Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 1957.
- Palmer, Patricia. *Lively Audience: A Study of Children Around the TV Set*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986.
- Pecora, Norma Odom. *The Business of Children's Entertainment*. New York: Guildford Press, 1998.
- Perlmutter, David. *American Toons In: A History of Television Animation*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2014.
- Piaget, Jean. *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*. New York: Norton, 1962.
- Pollack, Linda A. *Parent-Child Relations From 1500 to 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Ponterotto, Joseph. "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept, 'Thick Description.'" *Qualitative Report* 11.3 (2006): 538-49.
- Post, Stephen. "Disinterested Benevolence: An American Debate Over the Nature of Christian Love." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14.2 (1986): 356-68.
- Postman, Neil. *The Disappearance of Childhood*. New York: Vintage, 1994.

- Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Women Born*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1976.
- Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.
- Robertson, Carolyn. "Mister Rogers' Sweet Message to Grownups Is All You Need to Hear," in *Baby Center Blog*, 2 Feb., 2016,  
[http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom\\_stories/mr-rogers-message-to-02032016grown-up-fans-is-all-you-needs-to-hear/](http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom_stories/mr-rogers-message-to-02032016grown-up-fans-is-all-you-needs-to-hear/).
- Rodgers, Daniel T. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998.
- Rogers, Fred. "The Weekend Song," *The Neighborhood Archive*,  
[http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/weekend\\_song.html](http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/weekend_song.html).
- Rogers, Fred and Linda Philbrick, "Television and the Viewing Child." *Pittsburgh Area Preschool Association Publication* 3.1 (Oct. 1969): 1-23.
- . "Opportunity for Creative Work Needed in Our Educational System," Cong. Rec. 29 July 1969: E6404-E6405.
- . Interview by Karen Herman. Archive of American Television and Film. 22 July, 1999. <http://emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/fred-rogers>.
- Rogers, James Hillis. Rootsweb.  
<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/PAFAYETT/2002-10/1035728695>.
- Romanowski, William D. *Pop Culture Wars: Religion and the Role of Entertainment in American Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

- . *Reforming Hollywood: How American Protestants Fought For Freedom at the Movies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Rosenthal, Michele. *American Protestants and TV in the 1950s: Responses to a New Medium*. New York: Palgrave, 2007.
- Rosenzweig, Roy. *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Rotstein, Gary. "Virgil D. Cantini / Acclaimed Artist, Longtime Pitt Professor." *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*. 5 May, 2009. <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/obituaries/2009/05/05/Virgil-D-Cantini-Acclaimed-artist-longtime-Pitt-professor/stories/200905050171>.
- Rubin, Joan Shelley. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Rubin, Judy. Trailer for "Lessons From Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." <http://www.expressivemedia.org/fl5.html>.
- Ryan, Mary. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Rytina, Steven. "Youthful Vision, Youthful Promise, Through Midlife Bifocals: C. Wright Mills' 'White Collar' Turns 50." *Sociological Forum* 16.3 (2001): 563-74.
- Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971) 66.
- Sanders, Scott Russell. *Writing From the Center*. Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 1997.



- Scharfstein, Ben-Ami. *Ineffability: The Failure of Words in Philosophy and Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Schor, Julie. *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*. New York: Scribner, 2004.
- Schrag, Calvin O. *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Seiter, Ellen. "Children's Desires/Mother's Dilemmas." In *The Children's Culture Reader*. Edited by Henry Jenkins. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- . *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993.
- Sennett, Richard. *Families Against the City: Middle Class Homes of Industrial Chicago 1972-1890*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Shahar, Shulamith. *Childhood in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Sheridan, Kimberly, Kevin Clark, and Asia Williams. "Designing Games, Designing Roles: A Student of Youth Agency in an Urban Informal Education Program." *Urban Education Program* 48.5 (2013): 734-58.
- Silverstone, Roger. *Television and Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Simon, Zoltán. *The Double-edged Sword: The Technological Sublime in American Novels Between*. Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2003.
- Singer, Dorothy G. and Jerome L. Singer, eds. *Handbook of Children and the Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.
- Singer, Karen Slovak, Tracey Frierson, and Peter York. "Viewing Preferences, Symptoms of Psychological Trauma, and Violent Behaviors Among Children

- Who Watch Television.” *Journal of the American Academy of Children and Adolescent Psychiatry* 37 (1998): 1041-48.
- Skinner, Quentin. *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Slater, Philip Eliot. *The Pursuit of Loneliness*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Slotten, Hugh Richard. *Radio’s Hidden Voice: The Origins of Public Broadcasting in the United States*. Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, directed by Ben Sharpsteen, David Hand, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, and Wilfred Jackson. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Video, 2001.
- Sood, Suruchi and Everett M. Rogers. “Dimensions of Parasocial Interaction by Letter-Writers to a Popular Entertainment-Education Soap Opera in India.” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44.3 (2000): 386-414.
- Spigel, Lynn. “Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America.” In *The Children’s Culture Reader*, 110-35.
- Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992.
- Stanley, Liz. “The Epistolarium: On Theorising Letters and Correspondences.” *Auto/Biography* 12 (2010): 216-50.
- Steiner, Gary A. *The People Look At Television: A Study of Audiences and Attitudes*. New York: Knopf, 1963.

- Stewart, John and Milt Thomas. "Dialogic Listening: Sculpting Mutual Meanings." In *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, edited by Stewart, 184-201. New York: McGraw Hill Inc., 1995.
- Steyer, James. *The Other Parent: The Inside Story of Media's Effect on Our Children*. New York: Atria Books, 2002.
- Stout, Lydia. "What Strangles American Teaching—The Certification Racket." *The Atlantic Monthly* (1958).
- Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. New York: Henry Holt, 1982.
- Stuckey, Heather L. and Jeremy Nobel. "The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature." *American Journal of Public Health* 100.2 (2010): 254-63.
- Telleen, Maurice. "The Mind-Set of Agrarianism: New and Old." In *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land*, edited by Norman Wirzba, 52-61. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003.
- The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- The Neighborhood Archive: A Collection of All Things Mister Rogers Website. Accessed 3 July, 2013. <http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/music/songs/>.
- Thomlison, T. D. *Toward Interpersonal Dialogue*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1983.
- Tindall, George Brown and David E. Shi. *America: A Narrative History*. 8th edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012.

- Tobin, Joseph Jay. *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats: Children's Talk About the Media*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Translated by Wlad Godzich. Manchester: The Manchester University Press, 1984.
- Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Community and Society*. Edited and translated by Charles P. Loomis. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002.
- Townley, Roderick. "Fred's Shoes." In *Mister Rogers Neighborhood: Children, Television, and Fred Rogers*, 67-76.
- Tuber, Steven. *Attachment, Play, and Authenticity: A Winnicott Primer*. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2008.
- Tulloch, John. "The Implied Audience in Soap Opera Production: Everyday Rhetorical Strategies Amongst Television Professionals." In *Rethinking the Media Audience*, edited by Pertti Alasuutari, 151-78. London: Sage, 1999.
- United States Department of Labor Website. "Facts Over Time: Women in the Labor Force." [http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/facts\\_over\\_time.htm](http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/facts_over_time.htm).
- University of Pittsburgh News Services. "Pitt to Host Panel on the Making of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood Sept. 16." <http://www.news.pitt.edu/news/pitt-host-panel-making-mister-rogers-neighborhood-sept-16>.
- Vande Berg, Leah R., Lawrence A. Wenne, and Bruce E. Gronbeck. "Cultural Criticism: General Approaches." In *Critical Approaches to Television*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003.
- Waller, Willard W. "Courtship as a Social Process." *On the Family, Education, and War: Selected Writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

- Watson, J. and Rosalie Alberta Rayner Watson. *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1928.
- Watson, John B. "Against the Threat of Mother Love." In *The Children's Culture Reader*.
- Weiner, Lynn. "Maternalism as a Paradigm: Defining the Issues." *Journal of Women's History* 5.2 (1993): 96-98.
- Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
- Wilson, Barbara J., Cynthia Hoffner, and Joanne Cantor. "Children's Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Techniques to Reduce Fear from Mass Media," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 8 (1987): 32-52.
- Wimsatt, William K. *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954.
- Winnicott, D.W. *Playing and Reality*. New York: Tavistock Publications, 1971.
- Wirzba, Norman. "Placing the Soul: An Agrarian Philosophical Principle." In *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, 80-97.
- Wivestad, Stein M. "The Educational Challenges of *Agape* and *Phronesis*." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42.2 (2008): 307-24.
- Woo, Elaine. "It's a Sad Day in This Neighborhood." *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Feb., 2003, <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-fred-rogers-20030228-story.html>.
- Zboray, Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray. "Books, Reading, and the World of Goods in Antebellum New England." *American Quarterly* 48.4 (1996): 587-622.
- . *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Everyday New Englanders*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006.

Zboray, R. *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Zelizer, Viviana. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.